

An unofficial guide to meeting with Congressional Offices

Hackers On The Hill 2020

I. Summary:

1. **Have an ask.** What is the purpose of your meeting? What can the Congressional Office do about it?
2. **Find the right staffer.** Find an office with a link to you (i.e., you are a constituent) or to the purpose of the meeting (i.e., the Member sits on a Committee with jurisdiction over the issue). Then call the office you want to meet with and ask which staffer covers the issue you want to discuss. When you set up the meeting with that staffer, be clear about the meeting purpose.
3. **Follow up.** Send the staffer a post-meeting email with any follow-up items, or simply to thank the staffer for meeting. Be polite!

II. Details:

1. **Why are you meeting?**

An in-person meeting is generally more effective than an email, phone call, or social media post alone. While the purpose of a meeting may vary, the purpose should be a) specific, b) something the Congressional Office can actually do something about, and c) communicated beforehand to the staff you will meet with. Importantly, you should make a reasonable effort to learn what work has already occurred on the issue you want to raise. For example, you don't want to urge the Member of Congress to vote for bills that passed the year prior.

Sample purposes include:

- **Legislation:** You wish to provide input or ideas for legislation, either in an existing bill or something you'd like to see the Member of Congress work on. *Example: The Member should support legislation that strengthens security of IoT products.*
- **Oversight:** You want to urge the Member of Congress to look into a matter that the Member or her constituents care about. *Example: The Member should send a letter seeking details about a breach of personal information in her district.*
- **Constituent work:** You are a constituent of the Member of Congress and want her to help you with an issue. *Example: The Member should weigh in on unfair prosecution of security researchers in her district.*
- **Relationship building:** You want to establish a relationship with the Member's Office, such as by offering expertise or because you are a constituent. *Example: The Member is invited to an event in her district hosted by your organization.*

2. **Who are you meeting?**

The meeting will be most effective if you meet with the right staffer in the right office. The Member of Congress should have some link to the purpose of the meeting. While you can always meet with a Congressional Office as a constituent, it also helps if the Member sits on a Committee with jurisdiction over the issue you want to discuss.¹ *For example, if you wanted to ask about the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA), you could look for Members on the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, which has jurisdiction over computer crime laws.*

¹ Several Committees touch on cybersecurity, especially Judiciary, Homeland Security, Senate Commerce, House Energy & Commerce. You can find a Member's Committee assignments here https://www.senate.gov/committees/membership_assignments.htm (Senate) and here <https://www.house.gov/representatives> (House).

Members of Congress have staff dedicated to particular issues. To locate the staffer for your issue, just call up the Office directly and ask the assistant over the phone. *For example: "Who on your staff works on computer crime issues on the Judiciary Committee? Could you please share her email address? Could you please transfer me to her? I'd like to set up a meeting."* It is routine for offices to provide this information, though they may ask why. Meeting directly with a Member of Congress is harder, but not impossible. If that is your goal, you will want to speak with the Office Scheduler to make an appointment.

Once the staffer has been identified, reach out to her to request a meeting. A personal introduction is not always necessary. Be clear about the meeting purpose and forward brief background info relevant to the meeting. Do not assume the staffer is a subject matter expert, but do not assume no knowledge either. Also: be polite and credible.

3. Post-meeting.

Staffers usually meet with many people on many issues, so do not necessarily expect the staffer to follow up or reach out to you first. Consider sending a post-meeting email with any follow-up items. For example, if the staffer suggests other people to meet with (feel free to ask about that!), then your follow-up email could request their contact information or an intro. If it's not already in writing, consider briefly outlining your ask and responding to any points the staffer raised in the meeting, so it is easier for the staffer to retrieve later. If the meeting purpose includes a time-sensitive item - such as a bill that is nearing a vote - consider reaching out again closer to the date with a reminder.

III. Sample topics:

Again, the meeting purpose should have some link to the Congressional Office. With that in mind, here is a grabbag of haxxor-related topics you might raise in the meeting:

- Legal protections for security researchers
 - Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA)
 - DMCA Section 1201
- Privacy
 - Exemptions for cybersecurity activity from privacy requirements
 - Security requirements for personal info
- Export controls
 - Exemptions for vulnerability disclosure, pentesting platforms, forensic tools
- Vulnerability disclosure
 - Requiring federal agencies, contractors, or others to have a VDP
- Election security
 - State funding
 - Election infrastructure vuln assessments
- IoT security (i.e., transportation, industrial control, medical)
 - Oversight of regulatory agencies
- Offensive operations
 - Ongoing exploitations
 - Hack back, cyber warfare
- Vulnerability disclosure
 - Requiring federal agencies, contractors, or others to have a VDP
- State issues
 - Events and activities in the district
 - Constituent casework
- Provide a briefing on relevant research you've performed or published

*

*

*