



District Outreach Guide

SourceAmerica 

Section 1: Introduction



Congressional District Work Periods

Several times throughout the year, members of Congress return to their district or state offices back home for a district work period. Meeting with your legislator during a district work period, sometimes referred to as a congressional recess, is one of the most effective ways to educate them on key policy issues and to communicate any concerns.

Whether your legislator is meeting constituents in their district office, visiting local employers, or attending agency events, district work periods present a tremendous opportunity to engage with them. Many members also return home every weekend between voting responsibilities. If your organization has a special event or opportunity, don't hesitate to invite members of Congress to participate over a weekend.

This district outreach guide will help you prepare for and secure an appointment with your legislator or invite them to visit your nonprofit agency. Dates for district work periods can be found on this [Congressional Calendar](#).

Section 2: Scheduling Your Meeting

Follow the steps below to schedule a meeting with your member(s) of Congress during an upcoming district work period:

1. To schedule a meeting with your legislator, call their district office and ask for the district scheduler. The contact information for district offices can be found on the member's website.
2. Use the provided contact information to either email or call the scheduler. Utilize the sample phone script and/or email found in the appendix when reaching out to schedule your meeting. We recommend that you initially reach out via email, and if there is no response, then call the office. Additionally, there is a unique template available in the appendix if you would like to invite your legislator or their staff to tour your worksite during the recess. While the goal is to schedule meetings with members of Congress, don't be discouraged if your meeting is scheduled with one of their staff. Meetings with key staff members can be equally productive.
3. Once your meeting is scheduled, please notify SourceAmerica's Government Affairs Department (Advocacy@SourceAmerica.org) so our records reflect engagement with that office. Our team is also available to assist you in all aspects of congressional engagement.

If you're unable to schedule an in-person meeting with your legislator, consider attending events where they're scheduled to appear while in your state. Town hall meetings and other public events provide a different forum to raise issues with your legislator. You can find information about their schedule by signing up for their newsletters or mailing lists.

Section 3: Preparing for Your Meeting

Whether meeting your legislator at their office or taking them on a tour of your facility, it is important to prepare – be ready to tell your story and plan for your employees to share their stories as well. Self-advocates, caregivers, and family members all have an important story to tell and amplify your NPA's impact. When paired with legislative asks, sharing your nonprofit agency's story, and having your employees and their families tell their stories are powerful tools.

Tips to Help You Prepare

Researching your legislator in advance of the meeting is an important first step. Learning about their legislative priorities, if they're an AbilityOne Champion, and whether they've supported any key pieces of legislation related to disability employment can help you tailor your message to each member. If you need assistance, please reach out to SourceAmerica's Government Affairs Department (Advocacy@SourceAmerica.org) for background information on your legislator.

We also recommend that you practice telling your story before meeting with your legislator to help you feel more comfortable. You might only have a few minutes to share information about the AbilityOne® Program, what your organization does, why you're important to the community, and why it's critical to help people with disabilities gain and maintain employment.

Members of Congress are typically most interested in the work you do in their district and/or state. Answering some of these questions about your NPA and your mission will help you prepare for the meeting:

- How does your organization support and improve the local community and the lives of the member's constituents?
- Is there a specific segment of the disability community your organization focuses on serving?
- What type of AbilityOne contracts do you hold?
- What is the impact of a specific issue on your organization?

If you plan to include any self-advocates in the meeting, ask them to answer some of the questions below to help them craft their story:

- How long have you been employed by the organization?
- Describe the nature of your job. What do you enjoy most about your work?
- What about your disability makes it difficult for you to find employment?
- Have you served in the military? If so, please elaborate.
- What do you wish people understood about people with disabilities?
- What is most important to you related to employment?
- How has your job changed your life?



How to Conduct a Successful Congressional Visit

1. Be Prepared

- Be aware and knowledgeable of all meeting attendees, including any staff.
- Make a plan for the discussion.
- SourceAmerica's staff is happy to provide personal biographies of the member you're meeting with, along with talking points on the issues you're there to discuss.

2. Consider Time Constraints

- Members of Congress and their staff have limited time. Most meetings will be 15–20 minutes long.
- Introductory remarks are appropriate, keep the discussion on track, and avoid discussing topics that aren't related to the purpose of your visit.

3. Clearly Define the Purpose of Your Visit

- Set the agenda by telling your member of Congress who you are, who you represent, and what you plan to discuss.
- Describe who you've chosen to bring to the meeting and explain their status (e.g., one of 5,000 members of a disability advocacy group in your district).

4. Connect Personal Stories to Policy Impacts

- Decide beforehand who will share personal stories.
- Use the stories as an opportunity to connect faces to some of the facts and figures you provide throughout your presentation. The facts are important, but it's the personal stories that will stick with members and their staff long after the meeting.
- Connect emotions to the different policy outcomes you discuss.

5. Have an "Ask"

- In addition to explaining to a member why their involvement is important, you should have a specific request at the end of the meeting.
- Examples of requests include asking them to co-sponsor a bill, make a statement in support of your organization, or conduct a site visit. Your asks should be tailored to the legislative priorities discussed in the meeting.

6. Offer Follow-Up Actions

- Once the member has made their position clear, recommend follow-up actions to continue the dialogue.
- Offer to provide additional information that the member may have requested during the meeting.

7. Take a Photo

- At the end of the meeting, ask the member or their staff if you can take a photo commemorating the event.
- Most members of Congress have a Twitter or Facebook account and will likely retweet or share your post if you tag them. You should also tag SourceAmerica's Twitter ([@SourceAmerica](#)) or Facebook account ([@SourceAmerica](#)) so we can share information about your meetings with our network.
- See the [Social Media section](#) in the appendix for more details.

8. Provide Feedback and a Photo to SourceAmerica's Government Affairs Department (Advocacy@SourceAmerica.org)

- Feedback should include:
 - What you discussed with the policymaker
 - The policymaker's response/reaction/concerns
 - The response/reactions/concerns of the policymaker's staff
 - What you promised to provide to the policymaker and/or staff in response to issues raised

9. Send a Thank You Letter

- Send a thank you email immediately after the meeting, followed by a thank you note by mail.
- Thank the member and their staff for taking the time to meet with you, then summarize the outcomes of your conversation, reiterating follow-up actions discussed during your meeting.

10. Follow Up

- Track agreed-upon follow-up actions to ensure they're completed.
- Send any relevant information from the meeting to SourceAmerica's Government Affairs staff at Advocacy@SourceAmerica.org.

Section 4: Legislative Asks

Below are a few of the legislative initiatives that create opportunities and address challenges for SourceAmerica's nonprofit network. We hope you'll use this information to educate your members of Congress. Please reach out to SourceAmerica's Government Affairs Department (Advocacy@SourceAmerica.org) with any questions you may have about the following issues.

Federal Legislative Priorities

AbilityOne Program Contracting Goal

- The AbilityOne Program is among the nation's largest employers of people with disabilities. While being one of the oldest socioeconomic programs, this important resource is underutilized within the federal government. A statutory 1% goal would empower and incentivize federal agencies to consider AbilityOne solutions and create new employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities and veterans with disabilities.
- **ASK: Encourage your legislator to support the establishment of a 1% contracting goal for the AbilityOne Program.**



SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act (S. 2767; H.R. 5408)

- The SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act would raise limitations on the amount of assets an individual may have while receiving benefits (currently \$2,000; \$3,000 for married couples). This would improve the lives of people with disabilities by allowing them to use their savings to address emergencies and other extenuating circumstances. The act would raise asset limits to \$10,000 for individuals (\$20,000 for married couples) and adjust the levels automatically for inflation each year.
- **ASK: Request that your legislator co-sponsor the bill.**

Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act (S. 533; H.R. 1263)

- The TCIEA would immediately cease issuance of 14(c) certificates and designate a five-year transition period until employees with disabilities are paid at least the applicable minimum wage. The TCIEA also includes provisions offering states and employers financial support and resources to transition employees with disabilities to competitively integrated employment.
- **ASK: Request that your legislator co-sponsor the bill.**

Think DIFFERENTLY Agriculture Accessibility Act (H.R. 4586)

- AgrAbility is a U.S. Department of Agriculture program that provides services and accommodations for people with disabilities working in the agriculture sector. The bill would double the authorized funding for AgrAbility, which has not seen a funding increase since 1999. The bill would also authorize funds to help prepare and support youth and young adults with disabilities who are eager to work in agriculture.
- **ASK: Request that your legislator co-sponsor the bill.**

SourceAmerica has fact sheets describing the impact of the AbilityOne Program in each state available for review and download in the [Public Policy section on SourceAmerica's website](#). After meeting with a legislator, you can provide them with your state fact sheet, which contains specific information about legislative asks. Knowing you have this detailed material to leave behind will allow you to **focus on telling your story** during the meeting and convey the importance of issues that impact you. If you would like a copy of your state fact sheet or need additional information, email SourceAmerica's Government Affairs Department (Advocacy@SourceAmerica.org).

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do I find my legislators and their contact information?

A: You can find your legislator using the [U.S. House of Representatives "Find Your Representatives"](#) tool. Contact information for legislators' Washington, D.C. and district offices can be found on their official sites.

Q: What if my legislator does not respond? What can I do?

A: Don't be frustrated if you don't get a response right away. If you emailed the office and haven't heard back, try calling the district office directly to schedule a meeting.

Q: What if my legislator is not returning to their home state for the recess?

A: If your legislator is not going to be in town during the recess, you can still request a meeting with staff. Meeting with staff can be just as productive as meeting directly with your legislator, as staff will raise the issues you present during the meeting up the chain of command.

Q: What if my legislator is already an AbilityOne Congressional Champion and already supports SourceAmerica's legislative agenda?

A: It is vital that you still meet with your legislator once they're a Champion to continue to develop your relationship with them and their staff.

Appendix

Sample Phone Script:

Hello. My name is [name]. I am a constituent of [member of Congress] and work for [NPA name]. I am calling today to schedule an appointment with [member of Congress] when he/she is back in the state during the upcoming district work period. I would like to discuss disability employment issues and the importance of the AbilityOne Program. I am available to meet [insert days/times you are available]. Please contact me at [phone] and [email] to schedule an appointment. Thank you.

Sample Email:

To: District Director or Scheduler

From: [Your Name]

Subject: Request for Meeting – [name of nonprofit]

Dear [Name],

I am a constituent of [member of Congress] and work for [NPA name]. I would like to request a meeting with Representative/Senator [legislator's last name] during the upcoming district work period.

I would like to discuss disability employment and the importance of the AbilityOne® Program. I'm available to meet [insert days/times you are available].

Please contact me at [phone] and [email] to schedule an appointment.

Thank you.

Sample Tour Invitation:

To: Member of Congress

From: [Your Name]

Subject: Request for Tour – [name of nonprofit]

Dear [Representative/Senator] [last name],

I would like to formally invite you to visit [agency name] during an upcoming district work period. It will be a great opportunity for you to learn more about the AbilityOne® Program and its success creating employment opportunities for tens of thousands of people with disabilities.

[Agency Name] employs [number] of [state name, e.g., "California"] workers with disabilities through the AbilityOne Program. We'd love for you to visit us so you can learn more about our mission and see the impact of the AbilityOne Program for yourself.

We will gladly accommodate a site tour that aligns with your schedule. Please contact me directly to set up a visit.

Sincerely,


[signature]



Sample Social Media Posts:


The following examples may be used by NPAs to engage members of Congress through social media. Also provided are sample tweets that members of Congress could use to support the AbilityOne Program.

Suggested Tweets for NPAs



Your Handle
@TeamName

A huge thank you to [NPA employee name] for sharing their employment experiences and expertise with @[tag legislator]. Your dedication and efforts are vital in securing increased #DisabilityEmployment through federal contracting. #DisabilityAdvocacy @SourceAmerica [include photo]



Your Handle
@TeamName

Advocating for #DisabilityEmployment is an important part of what we do. We appreciate @[tag legislator] visiting us and showing support for our mission of creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities, @SourceAmerica, and #AbilityOne. [include photo]

Suggested Facebook Post for NPAs



[Redacted Name]
Date & Time • [Location]

It was an honor to welcome @[tag legislator] to [details of visit – example: visit our assembly line/break room, etc.]. We talked about the benefits of our work through #AbilityOne and @SourceAmerica. Our organizations have a shared mission to empower people with disabilities through advocacy and employment opportunities! We appreciate [name's] support. [include photo]



[Redacted Name]
Date & Time • [Location]

It's inspiring to see advocates sharing powerful stories with @[tag legislator] and emphasizing the importance of legislation in expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities through #AbilityOne and @SourceAmerica. #DisabilityEmployment



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