Congressional visits are most successful when NWP Spring Meeting participants work together strategically to schedule and plan them. Here are some tips for coordinating visits.

One month before

Schedule your meetings with members of Congress

- Decide who will make the Senate appointments from your state—only one person should do the calling or emailing. Decide who from each of the service areas will make appointments with representatives.
- Call or email the scheduler or education aide to set up the meeting. In most cases, the purpose of your visit is to briefly explain the work of the Writing Project, describe how teachers and students in your legislator’s state/district benefit from the program, and ask your legislator to support NWP.
- If you do not hear back from the scheduler or education aide in three to four days, call or email again to follow up. Sometimes education aides will not confirm until very close to the meeting date, so it is important to stay in contact with them.
- Visits to congressional offices typically last 15 to 30 minutes, so plan accordingly when scheduling multiple visits.

Up to three weeks before

Decide who will go to each appointment

- Create a strategy for what you will talk about in each of your appointments, and determine who in your group will address each issue. Plan to stick to a few main points and make a specific request for action. Your strategy may be different for each meeting depending on:
  - How much the member knows about NWP and your site.
  - The member’s specific policy goals and areas of interest.
  - The member’s voting record and history of support for the Writing Project.
- Decide who will go to each appointment (no more than six people). Be strategic and intentional about who is in your meeting and what each person will say.
- Give some preference to teachers when planning for your meetings, especially if they have stories about the Writing Project’s impact on their classrooms.
- Send the names of those attending the meeting to the education aide in advance.
- If you cannot get an appointment with one of your legislators, include time in your schedule to drop by their office to leave materials and a note.
Assign roles for your visits with members

- Assign someone in your group to serve as the moderator/leader during each visit.
- Know your legislator. This will affect what you talk about in your meeting.
  - Research senators’ and representatives’ agendas, interests, legislation, policy goals, and press releases on their websites. (Visit www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to find members’ websites and other contact information.)
  - What committees does your legislator serve on?
    - The Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee and the House Education & the Workforce Committee are in charge of reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the bill that authorizes funding for NWP. If your representative or senator serves on one of these committees, encourage him or her to support the reauthorization of NWP in ESEA.
    - For a list of House Education & the Workforce Committee members, visit: http://edworkforce.house.gov/Committee/SubcommitteesJurisdictions.htm
    - For a list of Senate HELP Committee members, visit: http://help.senate.gov/about/subcommittees/
    - The House/Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies writes the budget for education that includes funding for NWP. If your representative or senator serves on one of these subcommittees, encourage him or her to support funding for NWP.
    - For a list of Senate members, go to: http://appropriations.senate.gov/sc-labor.cfm
    - For a list of House members, go to: http://appropriations.house.gov/_files/HouseCommitteeonAppropriationsMemberList.pdf
  - How much does your legislator know about NWP and the work of your site?
  - What is your legislator’s history of support for the Writing Project?

Please note: If you need assistance gathering information about your legislator, we encourage you to email NWP at publicaffairs@nwp.org.

- Email your group to discuss what each person should come prepared to talk about. What updates? What stories? What content for the meeting? Below are some key ideas to consider as you prepare your talking points for legislative visits.

Description of site work
  - Describe the full breadth of your programming.
    - For example, in addition to the professional development work you do with teachers, include information about any of your programs that include a variety of settings (e.g., if you’re working with an afterschool or a family literacy program).
  - Are you working in partnership with a community college?
  - What other interesting partnership work would you like to share?
How to Plan for Legislative Visits
Ideas for Dividing the Work & Setting Up a Timeline

Digital tools

- How are you using technology in your classroom?
- How are you/NWP helping your colleagues better use technology in the classroom?
- How is NWP “ahead of the curve” in providing professional development for teachers in the area of digital tools?

Impact on students

- What evidence (anecdotal and/or through classroom data) can you share about improvement in student achievement in NWP teachers’ classrooms?
- Why do students need strong writing skills to prepare them for the 21st-century workforce?

Impact on teachers

- How do you believe the invitational summer institute and other professional development opportunities provided by NWP help meet the president’s goal of improving teacher effectiveness?
- How is NWP different than other professional development opportunities you’ve experienced?
- How has NWP contributed to additional leadership opportunities? Why is this important?
- How does being part of a federally supported national network impact your work?

- Plan your appointment time like you would plan for a workshop—quilt it together and put things in order. Go in with hooks to hang your stories on:
  - Who we are in _________ (your state or service area).
  - How we support what the senator/representative would like to see happen for teachers and students.
  - How we go above and beyond using our funding (our reach).
  - See for yourself (invitation to summer institute or other local site event)!

- Be sure to connect your work to your host institution or community. Legislators value your thoughts as a constituent. They rely on local stories and sources for their own work.

- Decide who will answer questions about the budget and your state data.

- Remember: the goal is to educate.

Fielding difficult questions

- Consider in advance how you will approach being asked difficult questions such as “How do you feel about NCLB/scripted programs, etc.?”

Decide which materials to bring

- Bring materials—both from your research and your site or classroom. Discuss as a group which materials should be included.
The day before

Review roles and talking points before your visits

- Review NWP talking points (online) and your state data (available on Wednesday night of the Spring Meeting).
- Review your introductions, main points, and materials as a group.

During your appointment

- Legislators expect you to make requests. It is important to make your request specific and direct.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, offer to get the information and send it to the aide after your meeting.
- Establishing relationships with legislative staff is key. Encourage the education aide to use you as a resource in your area of expertise.

After your appointment

Follow up

- Understand that your appointment time is not your only opportunity to talk to your senator or representative. Send success stories and updates all year long!
- Send a thank-you note after your appointment to express your appreciation and reinforce any commitments made during the meeting. Remember to honor any requests that were made in the meeting, such as providing more information. You want to remain a reliable source.
- Send an email to publicaffairs@nwp.org or fill out the “Participant Response Form” provided in your Spring Meeting packet, and let NWP know how your meeting went. Your visit will help in formulating the overall legislative strategy for the organization.

If you cannot attend the Spring Meeting

- Set up an appointment with the local office of your senator or representative, and talk about the work of your site and its impact on teachers and students in the member’s area. Invite local staffers to attend Writing Project events throughout the year. Share site materials and any local media coverage.

Modified from “Top 10 Things to Remember When Conducting Successful Legislative Meetings” (Washington Partners, LLC), the American Planning Association, and the NSTA website. Additional ideas gathered from NWP site leaders.