NACCED

National Association for County Community and Economic Development

NACCED 2026 Congressional Advocacy Toolkit

Why Congressional Engagement Matters

Meeting with Members of Congress and their staff is one of the most effective ways for members of NACCED to advocate for federal housing, community development and economic development programs. These meetings provide an opportunity for local practitioners to share firsthand experiences implementing programs that support counties and communities across the country.

NACCED members administer programs that address housing affordability, infrastructure, small business development and neighborhood revitalization. By sharing real-world examples from your community, you help policymakers understand how federal programs translate into measurable outcomes for residents and local economies.

Programs such as the Community Development Block Grant and the HOME Investment Partnerships programs provide essential resources that support affordable housing development, community revitalization and economic opportunity. Congressional engagement ensures that policymakers hear directly from local leaders responsible for implementing these programs.

When NACCED members meet with legislators they bring an important local perspective to federal policy discussions. Your experiences help illustrate how federal investments support local projects, services and economic development in communities nationwide.

The Value of Your Voice

Members of Congress rely on input from their constituents to understand how federal programs operate on the ground. Engagement from program administrators help lawmakers better understand the challenges communities face and the role federal programs play in addressing them.

You do not need to be a policy expert to be an effective advocate! The most valuable information you can share is your professional experience and the stories of the communities you serve. Explaining how federal programs support housing development, infrastructure improvements, small business growth and neighborhood revitalization helps lawmakers connect federal policy decisions to real impacts back home.

Preparing for a Successful Congressional Office Visit

Preparation is key to ensuring your meeting with a congressional office is productive and impactful. Taking time to understand the environment and research the Member of Congress helps you communicate your message clearly and effectively.

Understanding the Setting

Congressional offices operate in a fast-paced environment. Meetings typically last between 15 to 30 minutes and schedules may change quickly due to votes, hearings or other legislative business. Flexibility is important when navigating meetings on Capitol Hill.

Meetings may take place in a member's office, in a hallway or in another nearby location if schedules are tight. Remaining flexible and respectful of time constraints helps build strong relationships with congressional offices.

Visitors should also expect to walk a significant amount while navigating Capitol Hill. House offices are located in the Cannon, Longworth, Rayburn, Ford, and O'Neill buildings. Senate offices are located in the Hart, Russell, and Dirksen buildings.

Virtual meetings with congressional offices are also increasingly common and should be approached with the same level of preparation and professionalism as in-person meetings. Participants should plan to join a few minutes early, test their audio and video in advance, and ensure they are in a quiet location with a stable internet connection. Because virtual meetings often move quickly, it is helpful to keep remarks concise, clearly state your key priorities and be prepared to share materials or follow up by email after the meeting.

Research the Member of Congress

Before meeting with a Member of Congress or their staff, it is helpful to learn more about the office and the Member's background.

Consider researching:

- The member's biography and professional background
- Major housing, community and economic development issues affecting their district or state
- Committee assignments, especially those relevant to NACCED priorities
- Public statements or legislative actions related to NACCED priorities

Finding shared connections such as geographic ties, professional experiences or local initiatives can help create a more engaging and productive conversation.

For meetings organized by NACCED, participants will receive background information ahead of time, including key priorities, committee assignments, and relevant issues connected to community and economic development. Reviewing this information before the meeting can help participants feel more confident, tailor their remarks to the Member's interests, and better understand how local programs connect to federal policy decisions.

Crafting an Effective Advocacy Message

Congressional offices meet with many constituents each day. It is important to present a clear and focused message during your visit.

Bringing a few simple materials to a meeting can help make the conversation more concrete and easier for congressional staff to remember. Participants are encouraged to bring items that highlight projects in their own community, such as a congressional district map showing where CDBG or HOME-funded projects are located, brief one-page flyers from recent projects, or photos that illustrate the impact of local programs.

NACCED will provide standard one-pagers and national-level information. Adding materials that are specific to your community can make the meeting more meaningful and help staff connect federal programs to real results in their district. Even a simple project summary or fact sheet from a local initiative can help reinforce the key points discussed during the meeting.

Key Components of an Effective Meeting

Successful meetings typically include several core elements:

- Introduce yourself and your organization. Explain your role and your connection to the Member's district or state.
- Describe your work. Provide a brief overview of the programs or projects you administer locally.
- Share real-world examples. Explain how federal housing, community and economic development programs support projects in your community.
- Make a clear request. Ask the Member or staff to support specific funding levels or legislation that aligns with NACCED priorities.
- Use data and local examples. Concrete examples help policymakers understand the impact of federal programs.

Focus on Local Impact

Members of Congress are particularly interested in how federal programs affect their constituents. When possible, highlight:

- Projects completed in their district
- Residents or households served
- Local partnerships that leverage federal funding
- Economic benefits such as job creation or business development

Whenever possible, participants should connect federal programs to measurable economic outcomes. This can include job creation, small business development, workforce opportunities, or neighborhood revitalization efforts that support long-term growth. Showing how federal funding contributes to stronger local economies helps reinforce the value of these programs and makes it easier for congressional offices to see how policy decisions in D.C. directly impact their constituents.

Working with Your Team

Many congressional meetings involve multiple advocates attending together. Coordinating with your team ahead of time helps ensure a well-organized and effective discussion.

Preparing as a Group

Before your meeting, your group should:

- **Decide who will lead the conversation**
- **Assign specific talking points to different participants**
- **Ensure each participant understands the key policy requests**
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This preparation helps ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute while keeping the meeting focused and efficient.

Multiple Perspectives Strengthen Advocacy

A successful advocacy meeting often includes participants who represent different roles within NACCED's membership.

These may include:

- **Local government officials**
- **Community development administrators**
- **Housing practitioners**
- **Economic development professionals**
- **Nonprofit or development partners**

Multiple perspectives help demonstrate the broad impact of community development programs and illustrate how federal investments support entire communities.

How to Engage During a Congressional Office Meeting

- Begin by introducing yourself and briefly explaining your professional role. If appropriate, thank the Member of Congress or their staff for past support of housing or community development programs.

- Keep the conversation focused and concise while highlighting examples of how federal programs support projects in your community. Leave time for questions and discussion. Meetings often become more productive when they are conversational.

- If you are asked a question and do not know the answer, it is perfectly acceptable to say that you will follow up with additional information after the meeting.

- At the conclusion of the meeting, thank the member or staff for their time and restate your key request. Offer to be a resource for them going forward.

Follow Up

Advocacy does not end when the meeting concludes. Following up with congressional offices helps maintain relationships and reinforces the information shared during your visit.

After your meeting:

- Send a brief thank-you email to the member or staff who met with you
- Provide any outstanding information or resources you discussed during the meeting
- Share relevant additional materials such as NACCED priority program one-pagers or local project information

Following up should be viewed as the beginning of an ongoing relationship rather than the end of a single meeting. Staying in touch with congressional offices throughout the year by sharing project updates, inviting staff to visit local initiatives, or providing feedback on federal programs helps strengthen long-term engagement. Consistent respectful communication makes it more likely that congressional offices will reach out in the future when they are working on legislation or looking for local perspectives.