Developing and maintaining relationships with your legislators is crucial to the success of your business; building a connection with the district office is a valuable piece of the pie.

Make the Appointment

Each year, Congress takes several “District Work Period” breaks, during which they work out of their local offices rather than on Capitol Hill. Members are also frequently at home in August, around holidays, and at the beginning or end of each week.

Contact the legislator’s local office, which can be found on his or her individual website at United States House of Representatives or United States Senate.

Explain the purpose of your visit, identify participants in the meeting, and suggest possible meeting dates. Be flexible! The more flexible you are about the date, the more likely it is that your meeting can be included on the legislator's schedule. If you don’t hear back from a member of your legislator's staff, be persistent as well as polite. Don't be afraid to follow-up by sending an e-mail or calling the office.

Let IFDA know when you have appointments scheduled by e-mailing cwest@ifdaonline.org. IFDA can provide updates on current legislative issues and answer any questions.

What to keep in mind when conducting a meeting

Be on time
Arrive no more than 5 minutes before the meeting.

Be flexible
Prepare to meet with either the Member or the Member’s staff; treat both with equal respect.

Keep Politics Out of It
Do not discuss elections or campaign support in your meeting; it intimates that the Member is “for sale.”

Leave Behind Brief Information
Leave behind 1-2 pages about your company and the issues that concern you.
Prep for the Meeting

Plan ahead for what you are going to talk about, (see our story telling one pager). If you let IFDA know ahead of time, we can help with background information on the legislator and issues. Use the template on the website to prepare a fact sheet about your company and print the basics of foodservice to leave behind.

At the Meeting

Introduce yourself and your company and briefly explain how the foodservice distribution industry works.

If you have any kind of connection to Congressman or anyone you are meeting with make sure to mention it (school, civic organizations, etc…).

Talk about your business, who you are, who you employ, who you serve. Mention any kind of charitable activities you do in the community.

Tell stories to provide context to the issues. For example: My driver is struggling to pick his child up from school without the hours of service suspension that lets him work in the early morning every shift.

While district office staff are usually not experts on legislation, they are the eyes and ears for the legislator on how issues are playing back home. Information you provide on the local impact of proposed legislation will be well received by them and communicated to Washington.

Follow Up

• Let IFDA know how the visit went.
• Fill out the brief legislator contact form on the IFDA website.
• Send a written thank you to the district office.
• Send a picture to the local newspaper.

FAQ’s

Do I need to know what issues are in Congress?
No – you are teaching them about your business. What are the critical industry issues? IFDA will be happy to provide talking points on our top 2 or 3 issues

What if I don’t know the answer to a question?
It is perfectly fine to say you need to get back to them with an answer. In fact, following up is another great way to keep in contact.

The district director is coming, not the congressman. Is this a snub?
Not at all. The legislator may be overbooked and the district director is a great person to know. Sometimes he or she is an even better contact; staff can be more accessible.