Steps to Setting Up a Congressional Tour of Your Library

1. First, call their district office of your legislator and ask who handles their district meeting requests. Ask if they prefer e-mail, fax or a contact form on their website. Some schedulers prefer e-mail, some prefer fax, and some prefer appointment requests through the legislator’s website. It is critical that you follow their instructions explicitly; some staffers will not respond or acknowledge your request if it is not in the correct format. It also important to be patient; due to the volume of meeting requests, many schedulers will not acknowledge or follow up with your letter until two to three weeks prior to your meeting.

2. Write your request and tailor it to your goals. You may want to check the legislator’s website and sign up for their e-newsletters so you can tailor the request to items they have publicly mentioned.

3. Once you are two to three weeks out from your request, follow up with the scheduler if they have not contacted you. Politely ask them about the status of your request, and offer up your cooperation to make scheduling the request as easy as possible.

4. Tip: Check the Majority Leaders’ schedules in both the House and the Senate so you can request meetings during the District Work Period or on a weekend.
   House: www.majorityleader.house.gov
   Senate: http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/legislative/one_item_and_teasers/Senate_leg_calendar_page.htm

5. Due to time constraints, sometimes it is not possible for your legislator to accept your meeting request. In this case, you should request that a staffer tour your library. Often times, they will be the ones who do the majority of the work on your behalf or they will enjoy the tour so much they will want their boss to see it. You may also want to watch the video ALA put together about meeting with Congressional Offices: http://alawashtv.blip.tv/file/1936552/

6. Once the meeting is set up, start putting together materials for his/her visit. The ALA Washington Office can coordinate with you to make sure you have the materials you need. Personal stories matter! The more specific you can make your story, the better. Legislators care about how long their constituents are waiting for a computer or what small business resources you have. You may want to take pictures and issue a press release about the member’s upcoming visit.

7. Reach out to the legislators’s staff in case they have any questions beforehand – they may want to have some information prior to the meeting.

8. Conduct the meeting. Remember – your elected officials have a Constitutional obligation to listen to you. There is no need to feel intimidated.

9. After the meeting, follow up with the staffer to ensure all their questions are answered. Consistent communication is key to building effective relationships. If they hear from you regularly, they will be more likely to listen to you when there is a priority legislative issue.

Don’t forget! Please contact Ted Wegner, twegner@alawash.org, or 1 (800) 941-8478 if you have any questions. He can provide you with a variety of materials, including talking points!