



HOW TO ENGAGE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Having a National Conversation

You can engage in the national conversation about the importance of public parks and green spaces by informing your House and Senate members and asking for their support. Not sure who represents you in Congress? You can find your House member on this [web page](#) — all you need is your zip code, and you can find your senator's contact information [here](#).

In-person, grassroots lobbying is one of the most effective tools for persuading legislators and other elected leaders. A group of constituents coming together to make their voices heard about the importance of park funding can send a powerful signal to policymakers and their staff. A "lobby day" involves bringing a group or groups of constituents to spread out and meet with elected officials. Maximizing your effectiveness takes preparation. Here's an easy checklist you can follow to get the most out of your lobby day:

Lobby Day Planning Checklist

- **Do your homework.** Find out what committees the members you're targeting sit on, whether they have sponsored or co-sponsored any relevant legislation and what, if anything, they've said about the importance of public parks. Be sure to take information about the Olmsted Network with you and remind them that Olmsted designed the Capitol Grounds.
- **Set a date and make appointments.** Aim for the policymaker but settle for a staff member. In the latter case, you will often get an aide who understands the boss' thinking on the topic and can influence it.
- **Strength in numbers.** Rally as many fellow advocates as you can for the visit. The more constituents who show up, the more impact the visit is likely to have. (Note: Make sure to send constituents to their own representative's office; politicians are less responsive to people who can't vote for them.)
- **Have a clear ask.** Summarize your case and then have a clear request of the policymaker, usually to support a specific piece of legislation or funding. Focus your pitch on one or two specific issues. Practice your pitch and then practice some more.
- **Schedule the day.** Plan out the day clearly and simply to ensure that everyone is where they are supposed to be on time. Also, decide whether the day will consist solely of direct lobbying or other activities such as a reception.
- **Create a lobby day packet.** This will be a folder with all the information you and your grassroots lobbyists need for a successful day:
 - Include an agenda for the day.
 - Try to download a map beforehand so that offices are easy to find.
 - Draft a letter from your organization or coalition asking for the legislator's support.
 - Create talking points that highlight the main arguments and facts you want to present.

- Bring information about the Olmsted Network and your issue(s) that can be left with the legislator or their staff.
- Draft a sample thank you note. Make sure to send it— whether by snail mail or email— to the person(s) you met. Try recapping the points you made and reminding the legislator of anything they committed to.
- Include the next steps. After a day of lobbying, request that everyone send an email to the group recapping their experience— the people they met, the feedback they received, the follow-up that is required, etc.