

Lobby Day 2013: Raising Our Voices For Change

October 17, 2013
Washington, DC



TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL HILL VISITS

Objectives:

- **Communicate precisely what you want your Senators and Representative to do (your “ask”).**
- **Get a sense of whether s/he is likely to do what you ask, or at least the factors that will go into her/his decision.**
- **Establish and actively maintain relationships with staff.**

The Meeting:

First and foremost, prepare for Hill Visits the same way you would prepare for an oral argument. Learn about the pending legislation, the legislator’s previous and current positions, and whether s/he has already cosponsored a bill, or has refused to do so.

Meet the other NELA participants in front of the office ten to fifteen minutes before the Hill Visit starts, to spend a few minutes going over the plans for the visit.

In general, someone from the Member’s state or district should open the visit, emphasizing that she is a constituent, and describe NELA. A constituent should also take the lead for the visit, making sure that our points are made during the time available.

Each visit participant should *very briefly* introduce herself and describe her practice; constituents should identify themselves as such. Exchange business cards with everyone with whom you meet.

Find something for which to thank the Member, such as cosponsorship of, or a helpful vote on, a bill that NELA supports, or establish another basis for some common ground.

Senators, Representatives, and their staff will likely not have more than 15 to 20 minutes for the visit (more for staff, less for Senators and Representatives). For that reason:

- Stick to the topic.
- Presentations should be short, concise, and focused.
- Don’t let yourself get bogged “down in the weeds.” Details about the bills are provided in the written materials.

Talk about the impact of current law on you and your clients and how NELA’s proposed legislation would rectify problems or injustice. **Personal stories are most effective:** be prepared to offer a *short*, concrete illustration from your law practice.

If you don’t know an answer, don’t be afraid to say so and that you’ll get back to the person with the information after the visit.

If your Senator and/or Representative disagrees with you, don’t argue – try to find out *why*. Is it misinformation, ideology, party loyalty, other constituencies or interests that are important to the Senator or Representative?

Follow-Up:

Please report the information you obtained during your visits to NELA’s Washington Office using the hard copy Hill Visit Report Form or using the *preferred* online questionnaire.

Email thank you/follow-up notes when you get back to your office:

- Thank the people you met with for their time.
- Remind them what you asked for and what they committed to do.
- Provide any follow-up information they asked for, and ask if there’s any more information you could provide.
- Make any points that you were unable to make during the meeting.
- *Please courtesy copy Julie M. Strandlie, NELA’s Legislative & Public Policy Director at jstrandlie@nelahq.org, on these emails.*