# **A Beginner's Guide to NARP Day on the Hill**

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## Introduction

One of the most productive and gratifying aspects of being a member of NARP's Council of Representatives is the NARP Day on the Hill event, held every spring, in which council representatives and board members meet directly with members of Congress and their staffers to discuss issues important to NARP and its members, and advocate for a Connected America. But for those who have never done it before, the prospect can be quite intimidating. Although it may seem quite daunting, with a bit of preparation, it's an enjoyable and relatively stress-free experience.

## Meeting Day

You've scheduled up your meetings; you've attended the first day of the Spring Conference, in which NARP leadership has briefed you on our focal points for this year; now it's time to actually go out there and meet. Here are some pointers to help ensure a smooth day.

1. **Dress professionally:** This may seem to go without saying, but it's worth repeating. Congress is a very traditional entity, so traditional attire is appropriate: Suit and tie for men, business suit or skirt-and-blouse for women. Now isn't the time to wear your vintage conductor's uniform. Dress as you would for an important job interview, and you'll be just fine. And don't forget your NARP lapel pin.
2. **Be on time:** Better yet, be early. Congresspersons and their staffers are very busy, so be respectful of their time. That starts with punctuality. Better for you to wait for them than for them to wait for you.
3. **Be yourself, and be calm:** This is important. Congresspeople and their staffers are used to slick lobbyists. You're not one of those, and that's okay. In fact, they'll probably find it refreshing. So be sure to let them know that you're not a lobbyist, but a citizen advocate (and, where appropriate, a constituent). I typically point out that I'm there “on my own time and my own dime.” You may get asked questions you don’t know the answers to, and you may stumble on your words a bit. This is okay.
4. **Be brief:** Once again, it’s important to be respectful of the member or staffer’s time. Discuss the issues at a high level, trying not to get too bogged down in the details. If they’re eager to discuss an issue in detail, by all means do so, but apart from that, keep it simple, and offer to follow up later with additional information. NARP will provide you with info sheets to hand out. Offer these, or offer to send them via e-mail. The latter is often appreciated. Be sure to briefly cover both NARP’s focal points and, where appropriate, your local rail-related issues. The local issues will generally get more attention from the member.
5. **Be respectful:** You may encounter a member or staffer who is *not* supportive of NARP’s agenda. View this as an opportunity to build bridges rather than to argue. Indicate that you respect their views and their position, and briefly explain why the issues are important to us; tell them you hope to find some areas of agreement.
6. **Be non-partisan:** This is critical. NARP is a 501(c)3 organization, which prevents it from engaging in any partisan politics. You are acting as a representative of NARP, which means you’re bound by the same rules while doing these meetings. You can (and should) advocate passionately for issues, but you may *not* advocate for or against specific parties or candidates. And you may find yourself surprised: the party label does not necessarily indicate whether or not a member is supportive of NARP’s agenda. There are allies to be found in unexpected places. The broader the coalition we can build, the better.
7. **Be honest:** If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t be afraid to say so. If you’re asked about something with which you’re unfamiliar, tell them that you’ll look into it further and get back to them. Then be sure to actually do so. NARP staff will be happy to help with this.
8. **Ask questions:** Specifically, ask the member or staffer if there’s anything *they* need from *us*. What can we do to help them help us? Relationships are a two-way street, and this is a good chance to initiate that.
9. **Take notes:** Don’t rely on your memory. If a member or staffer asks for additional information, or you hear or learn anything that you want to look into further, make a note of it so you’ll remember to follow up later.
10. **Thank them:** Be sure to thank the member or staffer for taking the time to meet with you. A simple thank you goes a long way. And if they’ve voted in support of NARP’s agenda, be sure to thank them for that, too. This is also a good time to verbally invite them to NARP’s evening reception. (NARP will provide you with invitation cards for this.)

You may find yourself with down time between meetings. If this is the case, there are a couple of productive uses for this time. You could research issues you made notes to follow up on. You could also stop by the offices of members who declined your meeting requests or whose schedulers did not respond. It’s possible you might get an *ad hoc* meeting, and even if not, you can drop off the info sheets that NARP has provided. You might also check the schedules that NARP has provided and ask to “ride along” with another council member, even if it’s not from your state, just to see how others approach their meetings.

## Post-Meeting

Now the meetings are over, and you’ve made it through the hard part. You’re done, right? Not quite! What happens next?

1. **Report back to NARP:** Let NARP staff know about your meetings after the fact, as well as who ultimately declined your meeting requests. Let them know how the meetings went, whether the members/staffers were supportive, and *especially* if the member or staffer requested anything *from* NARP.
2. **Follow up:** As soon as you can, send an e-mail to the member and/or staffer, thanking them again for taking the time to meet with you. If they requested any further information from you, reiterate that you’ll look into it as soon as you can and get back to them, and then do so.
3. **Keep following up:** As issues of interest come up (e.g., when NARP sends out an action alert), contact the person or persons with whom you met directly, rather than sending a simple form letter. This is *far* more effective, and helps build the relationship. You want them to recognize your name, and to think of you when rail issues come up. If no such issues come up, it’s still a good idea to periodically contact them – not too often, perhaps once per quarter – asking them if there are any issues of interest where you and NARP could be of assistance.
4. **Schedule a local meeting:** Every Senator and Representative has at least one local office somewhere within the state or district they represent. Some of them have several such offices. Meeting with your member or their staffer in their local office reminds them that you’re a constituent and helps solidify the relationship, as well as emphasizing the importance of our issues. So if it’s possible for you, this is a great way to maximize your impact.

## Conclusion

I know I’ve covered a lot of detail here, but trust me that with a little preparation, you’ll do just fine. Don’t be afraid to ask questions of those of us who’ve done it before. Most of all, relax, and be yourself.