Americans for the Arts ACTION Fund

Best Practices for Congressional Zoom Meetings

1. **Have a leader and a plan.** Understand the goals of the meeting, the dynamics of the meeting, the number of participants, who you are meeting with and their position, etc. Know that the meeting will only be around 15 minutes. If you get more time, that is a bonus. It is also likely that the Member of Congress will drop in for a few minutes to say hello and will not stay the entire time.
2. **Plan out an agenda and who is going to speak about what topic.** Zoom meetings can be disorganized without a plan, so make sure you have an agenda in mind to make sure you cover the topics you want to get to. Know that the Member of Congress will also want to talk about topics too, but it is your responsibility to bring up the topics that you want to talk about.
3. **Especially for larger meetings, not everyone will be able to speak.** This is especially true for Senate meetings where you might have more than 10 or 20 constituents on the call. More constituents indicate to the congressional office that people care about the arts, but it also means that a Zoom meeting would be impractical if everyone tried to talk. So, plan ahead and designate certain people to talk briefly about the legislative topic and if appropriate, someone else to talk about a practical story which supports the legislative ask. Keep these overviews brief as we all know that people can lose interest on Zoom calls. This planning may require advocates to meet before the congressional meeting to determine roles.
4. **Balance the ability for people to introduce themselves in large Zoom meetings.** Given that you won't have a lot of time with your Member of Congress, you might not be able to allow everyone to verbally introduce themselves. If necessary for timing, ask people to drop their names/organizations in the chat box. You should also have an attendance list with contact information ready to email the Hill staffer (along with the policy papers).
5. **Don't overuse the Chat Box.** This can distract the Member of Congress and the legislative staff if the chat box is filled with stories, etc. which might take away from the message your group is trying to deliver. So, try to limit the chat box to introductions and links to documents that speakers are referencing.
6. **Use this meeting as a way to follow up with the legislative staff.** Think about this meeting as a first step in establishing an ongoing professional relationship with the staff (and the Member of Congress). Find a way to follow up with the staff via email. This could be an offer to send them more information on a topic. This could be to invite the Member of Congress to an event. Whatever the topic is, make you are setting up your next communication with them.
7. **Always make sure you ask the Member of Congress if they plan on supporting our issues.** This is the biggest error that happens during legislative meetings. Advocates have a great meeting with the Member of Congress, but never confirm with them that they will actually support our issues. So, make sure you ask them!
8. **Ask for the legislative staffer to drop their email in the chat box** so everyone can send them a thank you note (along with any personal stories, etc. that they want).
9. **Report back to AFTA/AAF who you met with and what you learned.** We keep track of these meeting and who you met with which helps us with our day-to-day advocacy. Designate one person to complete the Congressional Meeting Report Form within a day or two of the meeting.