



# CONTACTING ELECTED OFFICIALS

## WHO ARE MY POLICY MAKERS?

### FEDERAL

- » 2 US SENATORS
- » 1 US REPRESENTATIVE

» **NOTE:** If you live in the District of Columbia, a Trust Territory, or the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, you have one non-voting delegate in the House of Representatives.

### STATE

- » 1 GOVERNOR
- » Each state legislature has a different format.
- » Your state may have a State House of Delegates, State Senate, State Assembly, and/or other legislative bodies. Look up your state government online to learn more.

### LOCAL

- » Depending on where you live, you may have a mayor, city council, county council, city commission, and/or other legislative body. Look up your town or city website to learn more about their structure.

## HOW DO I FIND MY ELECTED OFFICIALS?

- » You can find your representative in the House by typing your zip code into the search bar on the House of Representatives website: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>.
- » USA.gov has a landing page with links to find contact information for your elected officials at all levels: The White House, US Congress, state, and local: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>.



## SETTING UP AND PREPARING FOR A MEETING

Policymakers are very busy, and they might not be able to meet with you when you ask. The staffer is an aide to the policymaker, usually working on a specific portfolio of topics (e.g., agriculture issues, health programs, etc.). WIC is usually just one out of many programs that the staffer may cover. The staffer in any given office may have a variety of titles, including Legislative Aide and Legislative Assistant. The staffer meets with individuals or organizations on behalf of the policymaker.

Before you have a formal meeting with a policymaker or staff member, be prepared ahead of time and remember some key points:

**AN ELEVATOR SPEECH GIVES THE MOST IMPORTANT DETAILS IN JUST A COUPLE OF MINUTES. IT'S EFFECTIVE, CONCISE AND STAYS ON MESSAGE WHEN TIME IS TIGHT.**

**1. BE SURE TO SCHEDULE YOUR MEETING IN ADVANCE BY CALLING YOUR SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE'S WASHINGTON, DISTRICT, OR STATE OFFICE.** You can find this number on any Senator's or Representative's website. Tell the person who answers that you are a constituent working for the WIC program, you will be in town on a certain date, and you would like to meet with the policymaker or staff to talk about WIC and its importance in the district or state. The staffer will work with you to set up a meeting or provide further instruction on how to do so. Every office works a little differently.

**2. POLICYMAKERS WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING SPECIFICALLY IN THEIR DISTRICTS AND STATES.** Before you arrive at your meeting, prepare certain materials such as notes on WIC data for your state and/or district, including the number of participants served as well as any breastfeeding data. Print copies of your state WIC profiles from the NWA website to give to the staffer during the meeting. These profiles contain state-specific data on WIC funding, participation levels, and breastfeeding rates as well as personal stories and state contacts. Collect any stories from participants and colleagues about the impact of WIC in their lives to share during the meeting. It is important to explain why WIC is important to their communities. Personal stories from real people are some of the best ways to grab the attention of policymakers.

**3. PLAN AND KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT TO ADDRESS.** Look at the policy maker's website to learn the Committees he/she is on and the issues he/she is interested in. Reread the recent Weekly WIC Policy Updates on the NWA blog to understand what the current policy issues are for WIC. Focus on WIC messages related to those issues. Be specific and direct and rehearse your elevator speech in case time runs short.

# ANATOMY OF A MEETING

Once you are able to schedule a meeting, confirm the time and address to ensure punctuality. When the day comes, be sure to bring a government-issued picture ID and business cards.

It is always helpful to have a basic template for a typical meeting. It should include the following steps:

- » Thank the legislator/staffer for meeting.
- » Introduce yourself and exchange business cards.
- » Ask what legislator/staffer knows about WIC.
- » If limited knowledge, provide WIC basics—number of clients served nationally, eligibility, services provided.

- » Talk about some of the WIC successes, targeting your policy maker's interests.
- » Describe state/local-specific data and experiences.
- » Thank the policymaker or staffer for their time and inform them how you will follow up.
- » Write a thank you email, including answers to any questions from the meeting. E-mail is now the preferred means of correspondence.

*Don't worry if the policymaker and/or staffer ends up asking a lot of questions as it will help you focus on WIC messages of interest to them. However, don't hesitate to steer the meeting back to the points you wanted to make. You have limited time so make sure you get across your main message.*

## NAVIGATING A DIFFICULT WIC ADVOCACY VISIT:

### BE PREPARED

As mentioned above, researching your legislator's favorite causes or recent media appearances can provide insights into what to talk about in your meeting and how to craft your messages in a way that will appeal to your legislator. There are policymakers who do not believe WIC is the most appropriate way to advance quality nutrition or public health goals. In addition, this research can help you prepare difficult questions that may arise, such as questions about fraud or immigration.

### WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

Make sure the information you give is truthful and accurate – while also tailoring the message to the audience. It's better to give fewer details than to give misinformation, or to fuel a hostile discussion.

### REMAIN CALM

It can be easy to get flustered when faced with difficult or hostile questions, but don't take it personally. Take a minute to make sure you remain calm before answering a tough question.

### REMAIN CONFIDENT

We know that WIC works, and our outcomes reflect that! Don't get defensive or flustered. Stay on message, and don't let yourself be drawn into a conversation about individual cases rather than the program as a whole.

### REFER TO SOMEONE ELSE

If you don't know the answer to a question, or you don't feel comfortable answering, politely say that you don't know, but you are happy to refer the legislator or staff to your program director, your state WIC staff, or NWA for clarification.

## CALLING A POLICYMAKER

Calling is particularly effective when you want to tell your member of Congress to vote “yes” or “no” on a bill that will soon be voted on. You can call the Capitol Switchboard at [202-224-3121](tel:202-224-3121) and ask for the policymaker’s office, call the District Office, or locate the number on the legislator’s website.

Once you are on the phone, state your name and where you are from (you may be asked for your zip code). It always helps to identify yourself as a constituent, to establish the local connection. State that you are calling to urge the policymaker to vote “yes” or “no” on a particular piece of legislation, and be sure to mention the bill name and number (e.g., “Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010” S. 3307). It is easy to find specific bill information at <http://thomas.gov>

▸ **NOTE:** This is a lobbying action. It is your democratic right to lobby. Lobbying is a particular type of advocacy involving an attempt to influence specific legislation by communicating directly with an elected official or his or her staff. Each state has specific laws for state employees about lobbying efforts while on the job. We recommend limiting lobbying efforts to coffee breaks, lunch breaks, after hours and other times not considered “work time.”

## HOSTING A POLICYMAKER

Inviting your elected official to tour a WIC clinic is a great way to get their attention, educate them, and spur more support for WIC. You can even invite the local media to cover the visit!

Another option is to host a breakfast or event for the policymaker to meet with local WIC directors, nutritionists, and participants. If you are able to host at a clinic, you may give the policymakers a tour before or after the meeting. To help with these events, it may be useful to prepare an annual report and fact sheets outlining the value of WIC to the specific community. You can also find resources to share on the National WIC Association’s website.

You could also organize a coalition of supportive partners and competent spokespersons from the medical, advocacy, business, and faith communities who are willing to join you in these meetings or clinic visits, and reinforce WIC’s role in

improving the nutritional health and well-being of mothers and young children in your communities. It is also effective to include voices of WIC participants who can speak as the “face of WIC,” including parents and grandparents who can speak about what WIC does for their children and grandchildren.

After the visit, follow up with a thank you email and any supporting materials and documentation that may have been promised, as well as answers to questions requiring further follow-up. Inform the NWA national office of the meeting’s substance, attendees, and outcomes. NWA is also available as a resource to you during the planning of your site visit. Contact Brian Dittmeier at [bdittmeier@nwica.org](mailto:bdittmeier@nwica.org).