

Virtual Congressional Meeting Tips

In 2020, the way that we interact with each other has changed drastically. This means that the way we build relationships with our members of Congress also needs to shift. Here are some tips for how to be successful in a virtual advocacy meeting.

Create a Professional Space

Virtual doesn't mean casual. Normally, we meet with our members of Congress in their offices, but in a virtual meeting we are inviting them, or their staff, into our homes! Remember to choose a place that checks the following boxes:

- Consistent, strong, and dedicated internet connection – preferably not a public connection
- Quiet with limited ambient noise
- Clean and simple background
- Private – try to find a space where no one will be walking behind you

Dress Appropriately for the Call

Remember that you are representing yourself, your community and Catholic Relief Services. This meeting might be happening in your home, but it is still with a member of the United States Congress. Take the time to dress the part, just like you would if you were visiting an office on Capitol Hill. Feel free to show personality or state pride, but make sure that your clothes demonstrate your dedication and respect for the issue you are discussing.

Reduce Distractions

Turn off your phone. The meeting is only half an hour long – at most! You need to be fully invested during the whole meeting. Turn your phone off or leave it in another room.

Close all un-needed windows and tabs on your computer. This will help your internet connection and will keep you looking focused on camera. If you look distracted because you are looking at another screen or window – the person you are talking to will notice.

Don't use the chat function. The chat function should only be used if there is a technical issue. While GIFs and memes can be fun in casual conversations, they can distract from the issue at hand and reduce the impact of your statement.

Come Prepared

Preparation is even more important in a virtual space. Though you should *always* come prepared to a legislative meeting, this is even more important when you aren't physically in the same room with your colleagues. Make sure everyone knows each person's role and the order in which everyone is speaking. Write down the order of speaking and indicate back-up speakers in case someone experiences a technical issue when it's his or her turn to speak. It's even helpful to write down the order in which people will introduce themselves.

Be Flexible

They are learning, too. The members of Congress and their staff have had to completely change the way they meet with constituents and it doesn't always go smoothly. Don't dwell on potential issues or mistakes but give space for those human moments to connect on a shared experience – like their cat walking through the video or a child making a cameo.