NANA

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ADVOCACY DAY PARTICIPANT GUIDE

What to bring, how Hill meetings are scheduled, and how to use NANA's leave-behind on Advocacy Day.

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ADVOCACY

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This is the participant guide for members registered for Advocacy Day on Wednesday, April 17, 2024. Registration closed on March 17, so you are on the list and we are now booking your meetings with congressional offices. The guide covers how we build the schedule, what to carry, how to use the printed leave-behind, what a meeting of fifteen to twenty minutes looks like from the inside, and what happens afterward. It is written for solo government-relations staff, general counsel and executive directors who have never done this before, and it is useful to veterans who want to check a detail.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read sections 1 through 3 this week, while we are still booking offices. Sections 4 through 8 are the working sections: read them in the week before you travel, and again on the plane. Each section opens with a sentence that says what you will be able to do by its end. Sections 9 and 10 cover the days after the event and where to keep going. The appendix holds a one-page meeting planner and a short glossary you can print.

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1
WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

By the end of this section you will know who attends Advocacy Day, what the day is for, and how its hours are laid out.

Advocacy Day draws a wide range of attendees: solo government-relations staff at small associations, general counsel teams from national federations, and executive directors who have never set foot in a congressional office building. We wrote this guide for all of them. It answers the practical questions that reach our desks every spring in the weeks before the event: what to bring, how the schedule gets built, and what to do with the printed material we hand out.

We are NANA's public policy team, and we took the guide from those questions rather than from a generic advocacy-training template. If a question in your head is missing from it, send it to us and we will answer it before the day.

Advocacy Day is held each April in Washington, DC, and the Mid-Atlantic chapter hosts it. A congressional office hears about association issues most often from professional lobbyists. It hears much less often from the three-person co-op, the rural library federation or the regional credit union that the issue actually touches.

Our job is to put those organizations in the room with a printed page, a schedule and a briefing. That way no one has to learn the building, the etiquette and the policy detail alone. We do the booking and the drafting. You supply the part nobody else can: who you are, where you work and what the issue costs you.

WHO COMES, AND WHAT THEY USUALLY NEED

Attendees fall into a handful of familiar groups. The table pairs each group with a member organization of the kind that sends them, and with the part of this guide that tends to matter most to them.

> "I assumed a meeting with a staffer was the consolation prize. In 2023 the staffer I met used my outfitter count in an office letter within the month. Nobody had told me that quoting a small member was the staffer's whole job.
>
> HOLLIS GREENLEAF, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTFITTERS AND GUIDES COUNCIL

Table 1. Five kinds of Advocacy Day visitor, with example member organizations and the sections to read first.

VISITOR	EXAMPLE MEMBER ORGANIZATION	WHAT THEY USUALLY NEED	START WITH
Solo government-relations staff	Federation of Community Libraries, Baltimore (16 staff)	A schedule they can follow without a team behind them	Sections 3 and 7
General counsel	Coalition of Independent Museums, Washington, DC (22 staff)	A clear view of how lobbying rules apply to the visit	Section 6
Executive director visiting for the first time	Chesapeake Watermen's Cooperative Association, Annapolis (3 staff)	The structure of a meeting of fifteen to twenty minutes	Sections 5 and 6
Board member or volunteer leader	Society of Volunteer Fire Company Officers, Frederick (9 staff)	What is expected of someone who does not do policy for a living	Section 8
Experienced staff bringing a newer colleague	Alliance of Regional Credit Unions, Columbus (35 staff)	How to hand over the lead in a meeting	Section 8

THE SHAPE OF THE DAY

The day has the same skeleton every year. Times shift by a few minutes, and the printed schedule you receive at check-in governs. The table shows the usual order.

TIME	WHAT HAPPENS	WHERE
8:00 a.m.	Check-in opens; you collect your folder, leave-behind and printed schedule	NANA National Conference Center
8:30 a.m.	Policy briefing on this spring's live files, then message training	Conference center
10:30 a.m.	Shuttles leave for Capitol Hill; morning meeting block begins	Hill offices
12:30 p.m.	Working lunch; delegations compare notes	Conference center
1:45 p.m.	Afternoon meeting block	Hill offices
3:15 p.m.	Report-back roundtable; follow-up questions collected	Conference center
4:00 p.m.	Reception and informal debrief	Conference center

Table 2. A typical Advocacy Day, from check-in to reception.

A day this full leaves little room for improvisation. That is by design, and most of this guide is about removing surprises from it.

2
CHECK YOUR REGISTRATION

By the end of this section you will know what your registration set in motion, how to correct it if it is wrong, and what to do next year.

Registration closed on March 17, one month before Advocacy Day. We use that lead time to build the day's meeting schedule with congressional offices, which confirm appointments in advance rather than accepting drop-ins. There is no walk-up registration on the day itself, and a visitor who arrives without a scheduled meeting will not be added to the day's rotation.

Your registration should show your correct state and, where relevant, congressional district. We group attendees by delegation, and an incorrect address can put you in the wrong meeting block.

The practical question now is whether your record is right. Check the confirmation you received and write to us if any field below is wrong. Changes are easy for the next two weeks and hard after that, because offices are already confirming the slots we asked for.

WHY THE DEADLINE IS A MONTH OUT

A month is the shortest window in which we can place about 200 visitors in two chambers. Offices decide who in their building will take a meeting, check the member's calendar and sometimes ask for the visitors' names and home towns. Each step takes days, and some offices answer only after a reminder.

This year 210 members registered. A pool that size cannot be reshuffled in the last week, which is why we usually decline a late request to add a person or to change a state.

WHAT THE REGISTRATION FORM ASKED, AND WHY

Every field on the form feeds a decision somewhere in the schedule. The table lists the ones that cause the most trouble when they are wrong.

FIELD	USED FOR	COMMON ERROR
State	Choosing the delegation you travel with	Entering the headquarters state when you live and vote elsewhere
Congressional district	Matching you to the House office that represents you	Leaving it blank, or guessing from a zip code that spans two districts
Organization and role	Pairing sectors inside a delegation	Listing a parent body instead of the member organization
Name as printed on photo ID	Building security lists	A nickname or a married name that differs from the ID
Delegation size	Planning meeting groups	Not telling us that five colleagues are also coming
Access or mobility needs	Routing between buildings and choosing seating	Mentioning it only at check-in

Table 3. Registration fields and what we use each one for.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2023: THE RICHMOND HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS

In 2023 the Guild of County Records Officers, which has 2,700 members and seven staff in Richmond, registered four people using the Richmond office address for all of them. Two of the four lived and voted in other Virginia districts. We caught the mismatch when we sorted the registrations, wrote to the guild, and received corrected districts nine days later.

Senate offices represent the whole state, so the two kept their Senate meeting. Only their House meeting changed, moving to the offices of their own districts. A staffer pays closer attention to a constituent than to a visitor from a neighboring district, and the extra attention is the reason districts matter.

A CHECKLIST TO RUN THIS WEEK

Complete these now, while a correction is still easy.

- [ ] Confirm your congressional district from your home address, not the office address
- [ ] Check that your name matches the photo ID you will carry
- [ ] Tell us how many colleagues from your organization are coming

- [ ] Send us any access or mobility needs you did not enter on the form
- [ ] Write your organization's one specific concern in a single line
- [ ] Book travel for the evening before

NEXT YEAR

If a colleague missed the March deadline, they have missed this year's rotation. The remedy is to register early in 2025, because an early registration gives us more time to place a visitor with the right delegation. Tell them now so they can put the date in a calendar.

3
HOW WE BUILD THE SCHEDULE

By the end of this section you will understand how your delegation was formed, how many meetings to expect, and why you receive your offices late.

We book meetings across House and Senate offices, grouping attendees by state delegation so members from the same district travel together rather than crossing paths with strangers from another region. A typical Advocacy Day builds roughly one meeting for every two registered attendees, since most meetings run better with two to four visitors than with one.

Meetings run in two blocks: a morning round and an afternoon round, with a working lunch back at the NANA National Conference Center between them, where delegations compare notes before their next set of visits. We assign specific offices to specific delegations the week before the event and distribute a printed schedule at morning check-in.

WHAT WE DO BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

The month between registration closing and Advocacy Day is the busiest of our year. We spend it confirming appointments with congressional offices, drafting and finalizing the leave-behind, and building the delegation groupings that determine which offices each attendee will visit.

Confirming meetings with Hill offices is the most time-sensitive part of this work, since congressional schedules can shift with little notice and a confirmed slot sometimes has to be renegotiated closer to the date. We build in contingency time for exactly this reason, which is part of why the schedule is not finalized until the week before the event.

WHEN	WHAT WE DO	WHAT YOU SEE
Registration closes (March 17)	Count registrations by state and district; form delegations	A confirmation asking you to check your state and district
Days 1 to 10	Request meetings with House and Senate offices	Nothing yet; most offices are still replying
Days 11 to 20	Confirm appointments; renegotiate slots that offices move	A note if your delegation is unusually large
Days 21 to 23	Finalize the leave-behind and send it to print	Nothing
Days 24 to 30	Assign specific offices to each delegation	A reminder with check-in time and venue details
Check-in (April 17)	Hand out the printed schedule, folder and leave-behind	Your offices, your meeting groups and your shuttle times

Table 4. The month between registration and Advocacy Day, as we spend it.

The silence in the middle of that table is normal. A quiet inbox does not mean your meeting is in trouble.

THE ARITHMETIC OF MEETINGS

We measure the meeting ratio as meetings booked divided by members registered. Last year, 188 members registered and we booked 91 meetings, a ratio of 0.48, a little under one meeting for every two attendees. Most attendees visit one or two offices, so those 91 meetings held between about 280 and 380 visits, or three to four visitors each.

That range is the reason for the ratio. A meeting with one visitor leaves the staffer facing a single speaker, while a meeting with eight leaves most of them with nothing to say.

This year 210 members are registered, so we are aiming for about the same ratio, which would mean roughly 100 meetings. The final count depends on how many offices accept, and we will not know it until the confirmations come in. Treat any number you hear before check-in as a target rather than a promise.

AN EXAMPLE FROM 2023: ONE VIRGINIA DELEGATION

Take a Virginia delegation of 12 in 2023, drawn from three member organizations: the Guild of County Records Officers, the Alliance of Community Radio Stations and the Society of Accessible Design

Professionals. We split it into four groups of three, each with one person from each organization. We booked six meetings, so two groups visited an office in both blocks and two groups visited once.

Table 5. One Virginia delegation of 12 split into four meeting groups (2023).

GROUP	VISITORS	MORNING MEETING	AFTERNOON MEETING
A	1 records officer, 1 radio, 1 accessible design	Senate office	House office, Richmond-area district
B	1 records officer, 1 radio, 1 accessible design	House office, Alexandria-area district	Senate office
C	1 records officer, 1 radio, 1 accessible design	House office, Richmond-area district	No slot available
D	1 records officer, 1 radio, 1 accessible design	No slot available	House office, Alexandria-area district

Six meetings for twelve registered attendees is a ratio of 0.5. Eighteen visits across six meetings put three visitors in each room, inside the range above. Groups C and D received one meeting each because the offices had no second slot. They spent their open block at the conference center preparing the report-back, which turned out to be useful: they brought the delegation's questions to the roundtable already written.

WHY YOU RECEIVE YOUR OFFICES LATE

If we sent a final list early, we would be re-sending corrections for a week, because offices swap staffers and move times until the last days. So we hold the final assignments until the week before, print the schedule once and hand it over at check-in. We also keep a contingency desk at the conference center for any slot that moves on the day.

> “In 2023 my group put a records office, a radio station and a design society in one room. The staffer asked each of us the same question about notice requirements and got three different costs. She wrote all three down.
>
> ESPERANZA VILLALOBOS-NYE, ACCESSIBILITY PROGRAM LEAD, SOCIETY OF ACCESSIBLE DESIGN PROFESSIONALS

4
WHAT TO BRING

By the end of this section you will have packed the right things, and you will have a one-sentence story ready.

- A government-issued photo ID for building security
- Comfortable shoes, because Hill office buildings involve more walking between meetings than first-time attendees expect
- Business cards, if your organization uses them
- A notebook or device for jotting down staffer questions to follow up on later
- Your own organization's specific concern or story, even if it is brief, because staffers remember the specific example more than the general ask

NANA supplies the folder and the leave-behind. You do not need to prepare your own printed materials.

WHY EACH ITEM IS ON THE LIST

The photo ID gets you through screening, and the name on it should match the name on your registration. Comfortable shoes matter because a delegation may walk between buildings several times in a day, in a city where the weather can turn between meetings. Business cards let a staffer reach you directly, which turns a single meeting into a contact.

The notebook is the item people forget. A staffer's question is a future task for you, and a note taken in the room is worth more than a memory at 4:00 p.m. Write the question, the staffer's name and what you promised, in that order.

PACK LIGHT

Security screening is similar to an airport's. Carry one small bag, because large bags slow the line and can be turned away at some entrances. Leave sharp tools and anything you would not take on a flight at your hotel.

You will carry your folder and your jacket for most of the day, so bring a bag that holds both without a struggle. Skip the extra printed materials. We ask visitors not to hand out their own papers, because a second set of documents dilutes the single ask on the leave-behind.

YOUR ONE-SENTENCE STORY

The line most people need to rehearse is the one about their own organization. A good story has four parts: who you are, one number, one local effect, and the ask. It runs about thirty seconds when spoken.

The Federation of Community Libraries has 1,900 member libraries and is a good illustration. The federation mails about 1.1 million pieces a year, which is the number that makes the issue real. A weak version states a position, and a strong version states a cost and a request.

WEAK VERSION	STRONG VERSION
"Our members are concerned about mail costs and hope Congress will consider the impact on small organizations."	"We represent 1,900 small and rural libraries. Together we mail 1.1 million pieces a year. At an average of 60 cents a piece, a 5 percent rate increase adds about $33,000 a year to our members' budgets. We are asking the member to support holding nonprofit mail rates at their current level."
Opens with a concern; names no place	Opens with a number; names who is affected
Leaves the staffer to guess the ask	States one ask, the same one printed on the leave-behind

Table 6. The same story told two ways.

The strong version takes about thirty seconds. You can say it from memory in a hallway.

A PACKING CHECKLIST

Pack these the night before you leave.

- [ ] Photo ID, with the name matching your registration
- [ ] Comfortable shoes that you have already worn for a full day
- [ ] Business cards, if your organization uses them
- [ ] A notebook or device with a page ready for staffer questions
- [ ] Your one-sentence story, written on a card and rehearsed twice
- [ ] A small bag that holds your folder and jacket
- [ ] Your travel confirmation and the conference center address

5
THE LEAVE-BEHIND, AND HOW TO USE IT

By the end of this section you will know what the leave-behind contains, when to hand it over, and what to say when someone asks for more.

Every visitor carries the same one-page leave-behind, drafted by our team and printed ahead of the event. It states NANA's position on that spring's live policy files in plain terms, with a single ask per issue rather than a long list.

Hand the leave-behind to the staffer near the start of the meeting, not at the end. It gives them something to reference while you talk rather than something to skim after you have left. If a meeting covers more than one issue, the leave-behind is organized so a staffer can find the relevant section without you flipping through it for them.

WHAT IS ON THE PAGE

The page has the same parts every spring. Each live issue gets its own block, and each block follows a fixed order. The fixed order is the point: a staffer who has read one block can read the others at a glance.

PART	WHAT IT CONTAINS	WHY IT IS THERE
Header	NANA's name, the date and the issue list	So the staffer can file the page
Issue sentence	The issue in one sentence	So the context fits in the first ten seconds
The ask	One request per issue	So the staffer knows what you want
One number	A figure that shows the effect on members	So the case rests on a fact
Contact line	Our team's address	So follow-up questions have a destination

Table 7. The parts of the leave-behind and what each one is for.

WHY ONE ASK PER ISSUE

A long list asks a staffer to decide what matters. A single ask lets the staffer carry the request into a conversation with the member without guessing. Offices that hear four asks from one visitor usually remember none of them.

We write the asks narrowly on purpose. Where an issue has three possible requests, the leave-behind picks the one most likely to move that spring, and the other two wait for another season.

HOW IT PLAYED OUT IN 2023: TWO ISSUES IN TWENTY MINUTES

In 2023 a three-person Maryland delegation met a legislative assistant for twenty minutes. It included Obadiah Fenwick of the Chesapeake Watermen's Cooperative Association in Annapolis, a representative of the Federation of Community Libraries in Baltimore and an officer of the Society of Volunteer Fire Company Officers in Frederick. The meeting covered two issues, and the delegation handed over the leave-behind in the first minute.

The assistant turned to the second block while the library representative was still describing the first issue. Nobody had to flip pages or say "turn to the back." The assistant asked two questions about the first issue and one about the second, then asked for a written answer on the second.

The delegation logged the request at the afternoon report-back, and we sent the office a written answer within six days. The follow-up made the office a warmer contact for our next call.

WHEN AN OFFICE ASKS FOR MORE

Staffers sometimes ask for a longer paper, a bill analysis or a data table. Do not promise to send your own. Say that you will pass the request to us, and log it for the report-back.

The reason is consistency. If every visitor sends a different document, an office receives a dozen versions of the same case, some of them in conflict. When we answer, the office gets one voice.

WHAT THE LEAVE-BEHIND IS NOT

It is not a place to add your logo, a slogan or a personal note. It is not a gift, and you should not pair it with one. It is not a replacement for the conversation, and a staffer who cannot say what you asked for after reading it has told you something about the meeting.

> “I handed her the page in the first minute and spent the other nineteen talking. She read while I talked, and at the end she asked me about the number I had underlined.
>
> OBADIAH FENWICK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CHESAPEAKE WATERMEN'S COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

6
WHAT HAPPENS IN THE ROOM

By the end of this section you will know how a meeting runs minute by minute and what to do when it does not go to plan.

Most meetings run fifteen to twenty minutes and are held with a staffer, not the member of Congress directly, particularly in the morning block when offices are busiest. That is normal and does not mean the visit matters less: staffers brief their members after the meeting and often shape the position the office eventually takes.

Open with who you are and where you are from, state your specific ask clearly, and leave time for questions. A three-person co-op's story is often the one a staffer remembers precisely because it is not the twentieth version of the same large-association talking point heard that day.

A TWENTY-MINUTE MEETING, MINUTE BY MINUTE

The clock is the hardest part for newcomers. Twenty minutes, the longer end of the range, feels long on the shuttle and short in the room. The table breaks one meeting into its parts.

MINUTES	WHAT HAPPENS	WHO SPEAKS
0:00 to 1:00	Introductions; hand over the leave-behind	Delegation lead
1:00 to 4:00	Each visitor says who they are and where they work, in one sentence	All visitors
4:00 to 7:00	One visitor tells the organization's story with its number	One visitor
7:00 to 8:00	State the ask in one sentence	Delegation lead
8:00 to 16:00	Staffer questions and discussion	Staffer, then visitors
16:00 to 19:00	Direct close: ask whether the office can support the position	Delegation lead
19:00 to 20:00	Thanks; confirm any follow-up; collect the staffer's card	All

Table 8. A twenty-minute meeting with a legislative staffer.

If the office shortens the meeting to ten minutes, keep the introductions and the ask, shorten the stories, and keep the close. The ask and the close are the two pieces never to drop.

READING THE ROOM

A staffer's behavior tells you how the meeting is going. A staffer who writes while you talk is taking the ask down, and you can slow slightly and repeat the number. A staffer who glances at the clock is signaling a hard stop, so move to the ask and the close.

A staffer who asks about your own organization wants the local effect, which is the part nobody else can supply. Answer with a specific number or a named place, and stop. A short answer invites the next question.

If the staffer disagrees with the position, do not argue. Ask what concern lies behind the view, write it down and tell the staffer we will respond in writing. A recorded objection is worth more to us than a won exchange, because it tells us what to address in the next briefing.

IF YOU GET A QUESTION YOU CANNOT ANSWER

Say so, and say you will follow up. We collect follow-up questions from all delegations at the afternoon report-back and send written answers to the relevant offices within the following week. Do not guess at a technical detail or a bill provision you are not certain of. An inaccurate answer is worse than an honest "I will find out."

In 2023 Signe Thorvaldsen of the Cascadia Forest Products Council, which has four staff in Tacoma, was asked whether a proposed rule's 50-employee threshold counted seasonal mill crews. She did not know, wrote the question in her notebook and told the staffer that we would reply. She logged it at the report-back, we sent the office a written answer on day six, and the staffer came back with a second question.

MESSAGE TRAINING

The morning briefing includes a message-training session aimed at first-time Hill visitors, separate from the policy briefing on this spring's live issues. Message training covers how to open a meeting, how to state an ask in a single clear sentence rather than a paragraph, and how to close a meeting by asking directly whether the office can support the position NANA is advocating for.

In the 2023 follow-up survey, 61 of the 84 first-time respondents named message training as the most useful part of the morning, ahead of the policy briefing. Most attendees already know their own organization's story. What they are less sure of is the structure of a meeting with a stranger who has back-to-back appointments all day.

> "I said I did not know and that NANA would write back. Six days later the staffer had her answer and sent me another question. I have been in rooms where a guess cost a company a year of credibility.
>
> SIGNE THORVALDSEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CASCADIA FOREST PRODUCTS COUNCIL

TWO RULES ABOUT WHAT YOU SAY AND GIVE

Two rules apply to everyone. First, congressional ethics rules generally restrict what offices may accept from outside groups, so do not offer a staffer a gift, a coffee or a meal. A handshake, a business card and a thank-you after the visit are enough.

Second, ask your general counsel whether the visit counts as lobbying for your organization. A 501(c)(3) organization faces limits on lobbying that other associations do not face in the same way, and asking a member to vote for or against a specific bill is the kind of act those limits cover. A 501(c)(6) association has more room but may still have registration and reporting duties. The Mid-Atlantic peer group for general counsel covers the detail, and we will point you to it.

AN IN-THE-ROOM CHECKLIST

Run through these before you walk into each office.

- [ ] Agree who opens, who tells the story and who states the ask
- [ ] Have the leave-behind in hand, not in a bag
- [ ] Turn your phone to silent
- [ ] Know your thirty-second story and your number
- [ ] Decide who writes down staffer questions
- [ ] Know the close: ask whether the office can support the position

7
TRAVELING TO WASHINGTON

By the end of this section you will have a travel plan that gets you to check-in rested and early.

Advocacy Day is hosted at the NANA National Conference Center, ten minutes from the airport by train. Shuttle buses run between the conference center and Capitol Hill throughout the day, so attendees do not need to arrange their own transportation between meetings once they arrive at the venue in the morning. Delegations tend to bunch at the stops and a full shuttle waits for the next one, so allow extra time. We staff the stops and will tell you which shuttle suits your schedule.

Attendees traveling from outside the DC area should plan to arrive the evening before, given morning check-in typically starts at 8:00 a.m. and the first meeting block begins shortly after a policy briefing and message training session. Attendees who fly in the morning of the event risk missing the briefing entirely, which leaves them less prepared for a Hill meeting than colleagues who attended it.

There is no group hotel rate specifically for Advocacy Day, unlike the room blocks NANA negotiates for the Leadership Summit. Attendees typically book independently near the conference center or near their delegation's first scheduled meeting.

CHOOSING WHERE TO STAY

Because offices are assigned only in the week before the event, you may need to book a hotel before you know your first meeting. In that case book near the conference center, because the check-in, briefing and lunch are all there and most of your day starts at one address.

If you are traveling with colleagues, share a hotel if you can. A delegation that walks to the venue together arrives together, and a late flight is easier to absorb when someone is waiting.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2023: TWO FLIGHTS, ONE BRIEFING

In 2023 a four-person delegation from the Federation of Youth Orchestra Managers flew from Seattle. Two members landed in the early evening before the event and reached the hotel by 8:15 that night. The other two

took the first flight on the day itself, landed in the early afternoon and reached the conference center at about 3:00.

The first two attended the briefing, the message training, the lunch and both meeting blocks. The second two arrived after both blocks had ended, in time for the 3:15 report-back and the reception. Their share of the delegation's four meeting seats went unfilled, and we turned one of the two meetings into a phone call the following week.

The earlier flight cost one hotel night. The later flight cost two people their entire day on the Hill.

TIME ZONES AND EARLY STARTS

Delegations from the West Coast and the Mountain states face the largest gap. An 8:00 a.m. check-in on the East Coast is 5:00 a.m. in Seattle, and the body does not care that the agenda is full. Arrive early enough to sleep a full night.

AN ARRIVAL CHECKLIST

Use this the afternoon before you travel.

- [ ] Book a flight that lands by early evening the day before
- [ ] Confirm the hotel and the route to the conference center
- [ ] Charge your phone and carry a charger
- [ ] Set two alarms for the morning
- [ ] Send your delegation partners your mobile number
- [ ] Check the weather for the next day and pack a rain layer

IF YOUR TRIP GOES WRONG

A cancelled flight the night before is the most common problem. Rebook the earliest flight you can, and send us a message with your new arrival time before you board. If you will miss the 8:30 a.m. briefing, tell us so that we can give your delegation partners the opening of your first meeting.

You will still be welcome at the lunch and the afternoon block if you arrive in time. Do not travel to the Hill on your own to find your delegation. Come to the conference center first, where the printed schedule and the shuttle desk can place you.

8
FIRST-TIME ATTENDEES AND DELEGATIONS

By the end of this section you will know what to expect on a first visit, how to work with a colleague and how to work with strangers.

FIRST-TIME ATTENDEES: A FEW HONEST NOTES

Congressional office buildings involve security screening similar to an airport, and hallways between offices are longer and more confusing than first-time visitors expect. Build extra time into your schedule between meetings, particularly if your delegation is assigned offices in different buildings.

Not every meeting goes as planned. A scheduled staffer meeting can be moved to a different staffer with little notice, or shortened if the office is unexpectedly busy. This is normal and does not signal that the office takes the issue less seriously, because congressional schedules change constantly. The contingency desk exists for the slots that move.

First-time attendees sometimes worry they do not know enough to answer a technical question. You are not expected to be a policy expert. You are expected to know your own organization's story and to be honest when a question goes beyond what you can answer on the spot, as described in section 6.

BRINGING A COLLEAGUE

Organizations are encouraged to send more than one representative when possible, particularly a pairing of a senior staff member or executive director with a newer staff member. In the 2023 follow-up survey, first-time attendees who came with a more experienced colleague rated their confidence in the room at 4.4 out of 5, against 3.6 for those who came alone. They also asked more informed follow-up questions at the report-back roundtable.

There is no limit on how many representatives a single organization can register, though we ask larger delegations to let us know in advance so meeting blocks can be built to keep an organization's attendees together where possible.

DIVIDING THE WORK IN A PAIR

A pair works best when each person knows their part before the door opens. The more experienced person usually opens and closes. The newer person tells the organization's story, because a fresh voice often lands better than a practiced one.

PART OF THE MEETING	VETERAN	NEWER COLLEAGUE
Opening and introductions	Leads	Introduces themselves
Organization's story	Adds the number	Tells the story
The ask	States it	Supports with a local example
Questions	Takes policy questions	Takes questions about the organization
Close	Asks whether the office can support the position	Collects the staffer's card

Table 9. How a veteran and a newer colleague can divide a meeting.

> "Our group meets between visits because one day a year does not build a relationship with an office. The people who return every April are the ones whose names the offices already know.
>
> EMEKA NWOSU-HART, VICE PRESIDENT, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, COALITION OF FAMILY FARM LENDERS

The split also tells the newer colleague what to watch. By the afternoon they can swap parts, and a person who ran the story in the morning can run the opening.

A PAIR FROM ATLANTA, 2023

The Council of Early Childhood Educators has 11,000 members and 37 staff in Atlanta. In 2023 it sent its Director of Data and Analytics and a program coordinator who had joined the council in January. The director opened each meeting and closed it, and the coordinator told the council's story using the number of centers in the district or state each office served.

At the afternoon report-back the coordinator said the second meeting had been easier than the first, because by then she knew which sentence the staffer would write down. The pair logged three follow-up questions, and we answered all three in the following week.

WORKING WITH A DELEGATION YOU DO NOT KNOW

Delegations are grouped by state, which means attendees from different associations, sectors, and organization sizes are often paired together for a full day of meetings. This is deliberate: a delegation that includes both a large national federation and a three-person co-op gives Hill offices

a fuller picture of who the issue affects than a delegation of similar organizations would.

If you do not know your delegation partners beforehand, the lunch between the two blocks is the natural point to agree how to handle a shared ask if more than one organization in the delegation cares about the same issue. We do not assign delegation leads, but many delegations informally settle into one by the second meeting of the day simply based on who has attended before.

THE FIRST TEN MINUTES AT THE CENTER

You can do three things in the first ten minutes at check-in. Find your delegation on the printed schedule and read the names aloud. Agree who will open the first meeting. Share mobile numbers.

A delegation that has done this walks onto the shuttle as a group, and a group that arrives together can be introduced together.

WHEN ONE PARTNER TALKS TOO LONG

It happens. One visitor tells a story that runs six minutes and leaves no room for the others. Agree a gentle signal before the meeting, such as a hand on the folder, and use it once.

The ask and the close have to fit inside the twenty minutes, because they are the parts the office will act on.

9
AFTER THE DAY ENDS

By the end of this section you will know what we send you, what you should send and how to stay involved.

Advocacy Day closes with a reception at the conference center, typically starting at 4:00 p.m., where delegations can debrief informally before heading home. We send a written summary of the day to all registrants the following week, including any follow-up items collected from Hill offices and a note on which issues generated the most staffer questions.

Attendees who want to stay involved after Advocacy Day should ask us about the Mid-Atlantic chapter's standing peer group. The chapter hosts Advocacy Day each April, and the group brings together general counsel and government-relations staff outside the annual event. Members in other chapters can also ask their own chapter chair whether a similar group exists.

THE FIRST 48 HOURS

Write your notes up while you can still read them. List each meeting, the staffer's name, what was asked and what you promised. Send the list to us within a day or two, even if you logged the same questions at the report-back.

Then send a short thank-you to each staffer you met. Three sentences are enough: thanks for the time, one fact you discussed and a line that NANA will answer any open question. Do not restate the ask in new words, because a rephrased ask can read as a different ask.

THREE FOLLOW-UPS TRACKED IN 2023

The Council of Early Childhood Educators, from section 8, logged three follow-up questions in 2023. We tracked each one to a written answer.

Table 10. Three follow-up questions from one delegation and how each was closed.

QUESTION	ASKED BY	LOGGED	ANSWERED	DAYS
Does the proposed rule cover centers with fewer than 20 children?	Senate office	Report-back, 3:15 p.m.	Written answer from our team	5
How many member centers are in the district?	House office	Report-back, 3:15 p.m.	Council supplied the figure; we sent it	3
Can the council provide an example of a state that changed its rule?	Senate office	Report-back, 3:15 p.m.	Written answer with one state example	6

All three closed within the week. The longest took six days, inside the following-week commitment.

WHAT THE WRITTEN SUMMARY CONTAINS

The summary has three parts. The first lists the follow-up items we collected and who owns each. The second notes the issues that drew the most staffer questions, which tells you what the offices were thinking about. The third lists next steps and the date of the next Mid-Atlantic briefing.

Read it once, then forward it to your board or director with a two-line note on what you did. A short internal report is what turns a one-day trip into an organization's habit. Boards approve travel budgets for what they can see.

A NOTE ON ADVOCACY OUTSIDE ADVOCACY DAY

Advocacy Day is NANA's largest single-day advocacy event, but it is not the only way members engage with NANA's federal policy work. The Mid-Atlantic chapter's bi-monthly policy briefings, held on the third Thursday of odd months, cover the same live issues in more depth for members who want ongoing involvement rather than a single annual visit. Members who found their first Advocacy Day meeting energizing but do not have the travel budget to attend every year are encouraged to join those briefings instead. The briefings are open to members from every chapter, not only those in the Mid-Atlantic.

MAKING THE VISIT COUNT INSIDE YOUR ORGANIZATION

The people who did not travel are the audience for what you learned. A ten-minute report at the next staff meeting does more for your organization's advocacy than any amount of enthusiasm in the hallway.

State the number of meetings you attended, the questions you were asked and the follow-ups that remain open.

Executive directors can add one more step: tell the board which issues drew questions. A board that hears an office asked about grant eligibility will understand why the organization tracks that file. Over two or three years, those reports build the case for sending a larger delegation.

A POST-EVENT CHECKLIST

Complete these in the week after the event.

- [ ] Send your meeting notes and promised follow-ups to us within two days
- [ ] Send a three-sentence thank-you to each staffer you met
- [ ] Read NANA's written summary when it arrives
- [ ] Forward a two-line report to your director or board
- [ ] Put the next Mid-Atlantic briefing in your calendar
- [ ] Ask us how to join the government-relations working group

10
WHERE TO GO NEXT

By the end of this section you will have a short list of NANA programs that keep your advocacy going between Aprils.

Advocacy is a year-round practice, and one meeting a year does not build a relationship. The programs below start where this guide stops. Pick the one that fits your role and your budget.

Table 11. NANA programs for members who want to keep advocating after Advocacy Day.

PROGRAM	RUN BY	WHEN	BEST FOR
Mid-Atlantic bi-monthly policy briefing	Mid-Atlantic chapter and the public policy team	Third Thursday of odd months; next on May 16 and July 18	Members who want ongoing involvement without travel
Government-relations and general-counsel peer working groups	Mid-Atlantic chapter	Between annual events	Staff who handle policy and legal questions
Leadership Summit 2024	NANA Meetings and Events	June 5 to 7, NANA National Conference Center	Members who want to meet the policy team and other delegations again
Fall Policy Forum	NANA public policy team	November 7, 2024, Washington, DC	Members who want depth on live files
Your chapter's regular meetings	Your regional chapter	On each chapter's own schedule	Members who want advocacy conversations close to home

CHOOSING A FIRST STEP

If you attended for the first time, join the next Mid-Atlantic briefing. If you are a general counsel, ask about the peer group first. If you run a small shop with no policy staff, start with your chapter's next meeting and bring one question from your visit.

HOW TO USE THE PEER GROUPS

The peer working groups are small by design. They meet outside the annual event, and their members swap notes on what offices asked, which phrasing worked and which files are moving. A general counsel who joins hears in an hour what would take a year to learn alone.

Emeka Nwosu-Hart of the Coalition of Family Farm Lenders co-chairs the Mid-Atlantic government-relations working group. Come with one question from your own visit, and you will have something to contribute at the first meeting. Arriving with a question is the quickest way to become a regular.

The goal is one action within a month of Advocacy Day: a briefing attended, a chapter meeting joined or a call to us. Members who act within a month tend to return the next April.

APPENDIX: A MEETING PLANNER, A SAMPLE LEAVE-BEHIND AND A GLOSSARY

Use the planner to prepare before you travel, the sample to see how the page is laid out, and the glossary to decode the vocabulary you will hear.

MEETING PLANNER

Print one copy per meeting. Fill it in at the conference center once you have your printed schedule.

- Office and chamber: _____
- Time and building: _____
- Staffer's name and title: _____
- Delegation members present: _____
- Who opens, who tells the story, who asks: _____
- Our one number: _____
- Our one ask (from the leave-behind): _____
- Questions asked and what we promised: _____
- Follow-up logged at report-back: yes / no

A SAMPLE LEAVE-BEHIND LAYOUT

The page below is illustrative only. It shows the layout of the real page, not the real asks for any year. The figures are invented to show the format.

SECTION	EXAMPLE TEXT
Header	NANA, National Association of National Associations. Advocacy Day, April 17.
Issue 1	Volunteer mileage rate parity. The charitable mileage rate is 14 cents a mile, set by statute, and has not tracked the cost of driving for volunteer leaders.
Ask 1	Support raising the charitable mileage rate for volunteer leaders.
Number 1	A chapter leader who drives 1,200 miles a year in service is reimbursed $168 at 14 cents a mile.
Issue 2	Nonprofit security grant access. Association headquarters need a clear path to eligibility.
Ask 2	Confirm that association headquarters are eligible for the federal nonprofit security grant program.
Number 2	Of 120 member headquarters surveyed, 38 receive public visitors and none has a dedicated security staff member.
Contact	Public policy team, NANA, 1000 Association Blvd, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 555-0147.

Table 12. An illustrative leave-behind block for two policy files.

GLOSSARY

- **Ask.** The one specific thing you want an office to do, stated in a sentence.
- **Delegation.** The group of attendees from one state who travel together between offices.
- **District office.** An office in the member's home district, often the next point of contact after a Hill visit.
- **Follow-up.** A question you could not answer on the spot and promised to answer through NANA.
- **Hill.** Capitol Hill, where the House and Senate office buildings stand.
- **Leave-behind.** The one-page paper NANA prints and every visitor carries.
- **Legislative assistant.** A staffer who advises a member on a set of issues and often takes the meeting.
- **Report-back.** The afternoon roundtable at which delegations share what they heard and log follow-up questions.
- **Scheduler.** The staffer who manages a member's calendar and confirms meetings.
- **Staffer.** A member of a congressional office's staff, who usually takes the meeting and briefs the member.



The National Association of National Associations is the professional society for association executives, boards, and staff, serving more than 750 member organizations and 2 million professionals through research, peer community, and advocacy since 1998.