

Academy for Radiology and Biomedical Imaging Research

Advocacy Training Guide

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The **ACADEMY**
for Radiology & Biomedical
Imaging Research

Advancing Innovation in Imaging Science

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Introduction

Notwithstanding current events that require the country's attention: elections, pandemics, economic challenges, or international emergencies, advocacy remains critically important. Although in-person advocacy is the "tried and true" approach, the COVID-19 pandemic upended the normal daily routines and presented an unprecedented opportunity to take advocacy off the Hill and make an impact from virtually anywhere. Moreover, how Congressional offices and agencies engage with constituents changed to meet these challenges as well. This guide will provide the foundational information to engage with policymakers, be it in person or virtually. The guide will cover identifying, scheduling, conducting, and following through on a successful meeting with your Members of Congress. While there are some differences between virtual advocacy and traveling to Capitol Hill, many of the approaches remain the same. And while in-person meetings will become available in the future, digital advocacy will remain an effective and available tool. In either circumstance, **YOU are the strongest advocate for your research.** Elected officials want to hear from the constituents and learn about their priorities. Speak up – because Congress will focus on the issues they know about.

Call upon the Academy for help and if you have questions (mheintz@acadrad.org). The Academy is here to support you and provide resources as you engage with your policymakers.

Opportunities to Engage with your Members of Congress

There are many opportunities to engage with your elected officials and their staff. Traditionally, most engagement takes the form of meetings directly between the constituent (you) and the Congressional office. More recently, those meetings transitioned to videoconferences or teleconferences, but look very similar to their in-person counterparts. In addition, elected officials try to keep themselves visible and available to their constituents both when they are in Washington, D.C. and when they are home and working out of their district offices. Review your Member's official website to learn how they engage with their constituents (not all offices use all these tools):

- **District office meetings.** Congress takes regular breaks and recesses throughout the year when the Member comes home. Representatives come home far more often, usually every weekend, than Senators. In addition, there is usually a month-long recess in August and other recesses around major holidays. When the elected officials "come home", there are opportunities to meet with them locally. Traditionally, this is at the district office. An alternative is to invite the Member to a coffee meeting with a small number of colleagues. This has the benefit of hosting an individual and specific conversation with the Member in a less formal environment. To request a meeting, find the contact information for the office closest to you (Senators have offices spread around the state) and follow the same procedure as below. The Academy can help find contact information.
- **Laboratory tour.** Inviting them into your laboratory to see, firsthand, the research you conduct is very valuable. In this way, you can show them what federal funding for biomedical research supports. Showing them examples of the tools, technologies, and patient benefits you are creating is impactful. Schedules are tight, and you may need to coordinate with your institution's government relations office, but the visibility and educational opportunity of having a policymaker in your facility is well worth the effort. Virtual laboratory tours are also an option—where you "show" the policymaker your facility via videoconference. These are logistically more difficult given the nature of mobile, video technology. But, when well-planned, these video-tours can be effective when an in-person visit is unavailable. Contact the Academy to discuss laboratory tours in more detail if you think this is an option for your facility.

- **Town Hall and TeleTown Hall meetings.** One tool that Members use to directly provide information to their constituents is through a “town hall” style meeting. If in-person, these are exactly what you think: question and answer sessions with groups of constituents to provide information and engage in conversations. More recently, Members have used teleconference versions where they take questions over a phone bridge. These are opportunities to ask questions in an open forum and show the Member the diversity of their constituents. Refer to your Members’ website or email them directly for scheduled sessions.
- **Meetings with Congressional offices.** Meetings with offices in Washington, D.C. are what most people envision when they hear “congressional meeting.” The rest of this document will cover the specifics of a traditional meeting with a Congressional office. Even with the increased use of alternative meeting options, like those described above, these remain the most common form of constituent-policymaker interactions and, post-pandemic, will gradually become more frequent.

If you have questions on any of these tools, or wish to discuss them in more details, contact Michael Heintz, mheintz@acadrad.org to have a conversation.

Identifying your Members of Congress & Requesting A Meeting

To identify your local Representative and Senators, use the Academy’s Take Action Page, <https://www.acadrad.org/take-action/>, and enter your zip code. Here you will find contact and other basic information, including Academy resources for meetings and other advocacy efforts.

Member offices can have different methods for creating a meeting request. Some will have online forms, while others will require an email to be sent to their office scheduler. Reach out to the Academy for a scheduler’s contact information if it is not readily identifiable. In either format, when requesting a meeting identify your institution and that you are **a constituent**. In your request include:

- Name, Degrees
- Title, Department
- Institution
- Preferred date and time for your meeting (note this may change based on office availability)
- Note if this is a virtual or in-person request
- Meeting Topic (Your Research Area, Vital Funding for NIH, etc.)
- If you have leadership from your department joining you, be sure to indicate who that person is and their title.

Submit your meeting request at least 2 weeks before your preferred dates. Congressional offices rarely schedule meetings more than 2 weeks in advance, and while you are waiting hold the day/time you requested so rescheduling can be kept to a minimum.

Here is example language for contacting your Congressional office:

“Good afternoon NAME,

I am emailing to request a meeting between MEMBER NAME, or a member their staff, on DATE OR RANGE OF DATES. I am a JOB TITLE at INSTITUTION, currently focused on RESEARCH TOPIC and WILL BE IN WASHINGTON IN A FEW WEEKS/WOULD WELCOME THE CHANCE TO CONNECT IN-PERSON OR VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE OR CONFERENCE CALL.

As a constituent of **MEMBER NAME**, I would love the opportunity to discuss current imaging and medical innovations happening in my **LAB / DEPARTMENT / INSTITUTION**, and how they are impacting patients in our District.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope we can arrange a convenient time soon. Have a great day.

Best,
NAME
AFFILIATION
CONTACT INFORMATION”

While your request will seek time with the Member, please note they may not be available. More often you will meet with a staff member that handles your Member’s health, science, or technology policy agenda. While these staff members may seem young, please keep in mind that they are the subject matter expert for their assigned portfolios and are the best people to relay your message to the Member.

Your Meeting Has Been Requested

Be patient - these Members are inundated with meeting requests daily and may take 2-3 days before you hear from the scheduler. If you do not receive a response within a couple of days, send a short and polite follow-up.

Next, notify the Academy – **PLEASE keep the Academy up to date on all meeting requests you have submitted.** It may be simplest to cc or bcc Michael Heintz, mheintz@acadrad.org. Also consider informing your departmental leadership and/or the government relations office at your institution as they may have helpful relationships and materials already prepared for these types of meetings.

Your Meeting Has Been Scheduled

Research:

Know the Member and the office you are meeting with. Take some time to understand their position on healthcare issues, specifically their position on increased and sustained federal funding for NIH. It is important to know if the office is an ally, undecided, or opposed to research funding (note the latter is rarely the case). Review the Member’s website for their position statements, press releases, committee assignments, and other substantive information. Contact the Academy for further information and detail.

24-hours Before the Meeting:

Twenty-four hours before your scheduled meeting, confirm with the scheduler or the legislative aide you are meeting. Note the time, location, who is attending, and re-iterate the discussion topic. Use this opportunity to attach any **simple, non-technical** links and materials. Providing these materials in advance both makes a meeting more efficient and provides an opportunity for laying a foundation before the discussions. Do not be disappointed if office does not review the materials in advance—they receive mountains of documents daily. However, by providing them early, you can reference them during your conversation.

Materials:

Staffers like to be prepared going into meetings. Sending out informational links the day before will allow them the chance to prepare quickly for your meeting. This may also be useful for you, as you might be

referencing the materials throughout the meeting and the staff member can now pull them up while you are speaking. When meeting in-person, leaving your business card and selected hard copy versions at the conclusion of your meeting is also helpful. If you are leaving materials behind, have a folder prepared to keep the materials together making delivery easy. One-page sheets on what you are asking the office to support and of the importance of imaging research are good ways to cap your conversation and provide easy references. Refer to the Academy's website for resources on funding for NIH and NIBIB, the benefits of imaging, and related documents you are encouraged to use.

Keeping the documents simple, with your research expressed in layman's terms, will help ensure maximizing your meeting. Do not treat this as a technical presentation—using complex medical or scientific terms will confuse, and ultimately lose, your audience. Presume your audience completed basic science courses like chemistry and biology, but nothing advanced. While many offices are now hiring staff with advanced science degrees, it is not universal. If you meet with one of these staffers, it will be clear early in the conversation and you can moderate your discussion accordingly.

Talking Points:

Remember **you are the expert on your own research**. These Member offices need to be able to make the connection between their votes on funding for NIH (appropriations) and the impact on their district/constituents and advancing biomedical research. Explaining your research, and how it is funded, will help them make that connection. Members and their staff will have varying levels of knowledge on imaging technology and science in general. But remember the points above about keeping it simple and understandable. Use basic terms and be sure to connect the dots between your research and positive patient outcomes.

Personal stories tend to stick most in the minds of Members and their staff, and they help fully illustrate the impact your research has on patients in the district. How does your work impact patients? Do you have a story about your interaction with a patient that led to a positive result? How is your funding used to employ people in your community? Have you been recognized by your institution or community for your contributions? Putting a personal overlay on your conversation will make you, and by extension your research, more memorable to your audience.

When you are developing your talking points consider using the Academy advocacy resources that can be found on at <https://www.acadrad.org/our-advocacy/>. Additionally, here are the major points the Academy asks you convey during your meeting:

Academy's FY22 Recommendation for NIH Funding (i.e., "Our Ask"). This information is the **top priority** to convey during your meeting. It is the action you are asking the office to support:

- An increase of \$3.177 billion to the National Institutes of Health over FY21, making their overall appropriation \$46.111 billion.
- An increase of \$30.4 million to the National Institute for Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB) over FY21 making their annual appropriation \$441.1 million.

This figure is calculated by relying on the Biomedical Research and Development Price Index (the rate of inflation for research, 2.4%) plus an additional 5% over FY21. The 5% figure is drawn from past statements from NIH leadership about how to maintain a strong, national investment in the biomedical research space. Academy coalition partners across the biomedical research space are also advocating for the same increase to NIH.

Sustained and dependable research funding at NIH results in (this is the support for the asks above):

- A continuum of scientific knowledge and understanding that leads to better technologies, treatments, and therapeutics for patients across hundreds of diseases and disorders. Imaging research has implications for the full spectrum of biomedical advancements from understanding the brain and conditions like Alzheimer’s disease and addiction, lung function during the COVID-19 pandemic, and advancing reproductive health to name just a few. If your work focuses on a specific disease or disorder, highlight it and discuss how your work advances our collective knowledge and otherwise benefits patient outcomes.
- Imaging research leads to a higher number of patents, 25 per \$100 million of NIBIB funding, and \$575 million in economic impact.¹
- The federal government is the largest supporter of scientific research, which in turn creates a pipeline of next generation scientists to make tomorrow’s discoveries. Without federal support, this research would not otherwise be sustained, and these researchers may ultimately pursue other professions.
- Job creation at more than 2,500 university and academic medical research institutions across the United States, supporting over 300,000 researchers nationwide.²

Other talking points to consider during the discussion:

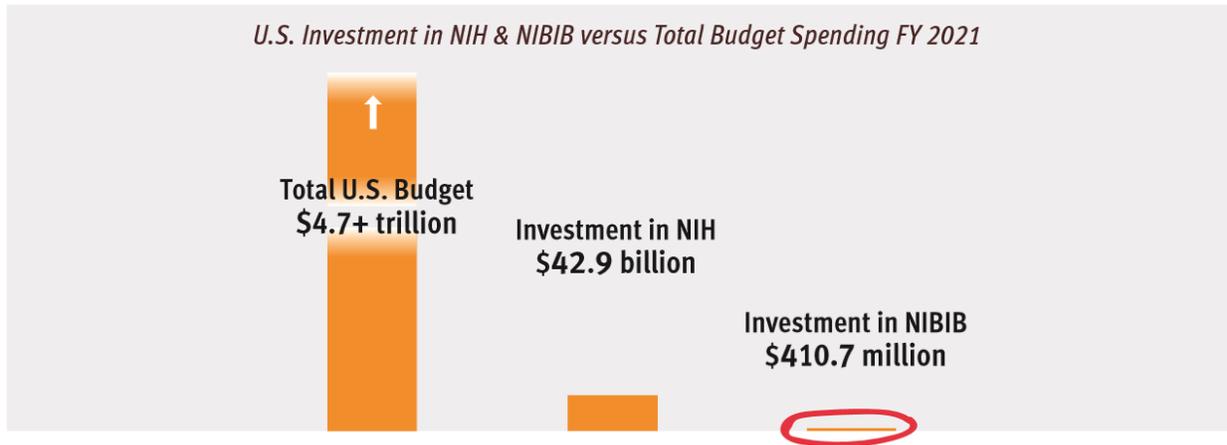
- More than 80% of the NIH’s annual budget flows back into communities across the nation in the form of research grants and their corresponding innovations.
- Imaging has a fundamental role in advancing the discovery, detection, and treatment of nearly all diseases. Use your own research to highlight examples of how this is true.
- Imaging research fuels private sector innovation, benefiting patients in clinical settings.

You may also want to include some state specific information including what your state received in funding for Diagnostic Imaging research. The Academy’s “NIH In Your State” map is available to Academy members. Please visit: <https://www.acadrad.org/our-advocacy/> and click on “In Your State” to obtain up-to-date state information as well as breakdown for your state and university by reviewing our NIH Data Collection Project resources found here: <https://www.acadrad.org/nih-datacollection-project/> (these figures are updated approximately every March/April). In addition, United for Medical Research annually provides state-specific factsheets addressing biomedical research (<https://www.unitedformedicalresearch.org/nih-in-your-state/>).

This graph may be helpful and is available in handout form on the Academy’s website:

¹ Battelle Technology Partnership Practice, *Patents as Proxies Revisited: NIH Innovation 2000 to 2013*, available at: <https://www.acadrad.org/battelle-report/>.

² <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/budget> and <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/impact-nih-research/our-society>.



Most importantly, **rehearse your introduction and these talking points BEFORE your meeting**. This “elevator pitch” is crucial to laying the foundation for your entire conversation. Decide how you will frame your research and integrate the talking points above into your conversational style in advance, and then **practice until you have a smooth delivery**. Moreover, if you have multiple colleagues in your meeting, decide before the meeting the order of introduction and who will address which points. Keep your audience in mind and pause regularly to allow for questions from the staffer. Pausing is particularly important during digital or phone meetings because you will not have the visual cues of an in-person conversation. A general pattern looks like this, and you are encouraged to personalize it for your own style and approach:

“Hello and thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I am **NAME** and am a **FIELD** researcher at **INSTITUTION**. I study **FIELD OF RESEARCH**, which improves our understanding of **BIOLOGICAL SYSTEM** by **IMPACT OF YOUR WORK**. I am here today to ask you to support the federal funding for the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering. Specifically, I would ask **MEMBER** to support an increase to NIH funding by \$3.177 Billion to at least \$46.111 Billion for FY22 and to increase NIBIB funding by \$30.4 Million to at least \$441.1 Million for FY22.

“Providing for dependable and consistent funding for NIH provides a great many benefits to the field of biomedical research. For example, **INCORPORATE TALKING POINTS ABOVE.**”

Meeting Day

You made it! You confirmed with the office, you know where and how you are meeting (either the Congressional office building and room, phone bridge, or virtual meeting platform, i.e., Zoom, WebEx), time, and names of all the attendees. In addition, you rehearsed your elevator pitch and sent simple and understandable resources to the office ahead of time to set your foundation.

Once in the meeting, your **goal is to advocate for NIH funding and educate them on the incredible importance of your research**, as well as the impact it will have on advancing technology that aids healthcare decision-making on behalf of patients. Without imaging in its many forms, physicians cannot make the determinations they do on so many illnesses and diseases. This role is not always understood by those in non-healthcare professions.

Tips for a Successful Meeting:

- Be early to your appointment. If you are meeting in person, arrive at the office at least 5 minutes before your scheduled meeting time and check in with the receptionist. If meeting via phone or videoconference, open the bridge at least 5 minutes early so you are “there” when the office logs in. Congressional offices have very tight schedules and arriving/calling in late will only shorten your meeting that very likely has a hard stop.
- General meeting etiquette applies for both kinds of meetings:
 - In-person:
 - Dress for a business meeting. Try to avoid casual clothes and scrubs.
 - Have your business card ready to hand out.
 - Have your hard copy materials organized and in a folder for easy distribution.
 - Thank them for taking the time for the meeting and keep non-substantive “chit chat” to a minimum (remember, the clock is ticking).
 - After the meeting is over, remember you are still on Capitol Hill and you never know who may be listening to a conversation in an elevator or hallway. Save any critical evaluation of the meeting, or comments on who you met with, until you are somewhere private.
 - Digital:
 - Test your audio and video before the meeting, if possible.
 - Aim for the best light. Remember that too much light behind you will wash you out, so try to keep a light in front of you.
 - Dress professionally (at least from the waist up!).
 - Have a neutral background or use a virtual background (maybe of one of your scientific images?).
 - Try your best to eliminate background noise. While there is much more understanding for the disruptions that come from working at home, do try to be in a quiet room for the length of the conversation.
 - Thank them for taking the time for the meeting and keep non-substantive “chit chat” to a minimum (remember, the clock is ticking).
- Your meeting will be short. The average length is usually between 15 and 20 minutes, so stay on topic and try to hit your talking points in a concise manner. Practicing your introduction and talking points will help.
- The purpose of this call is to connect this office with a constituent (you) doing important research in the district. If you are a longtime resident of the state/district that may also be good to mention.
- You are the scientific expert and stick to what you know. Avoid the temptation to get too specific on the appropriations process or other legislative issues, as that is their job. Speak to your research and how you truly believe it is impacting patient outcomes for the better.
- In addition to providing them information, offer to be a resource to them if they have questions on imaging, technologies, or biomedical research. They may have technical questions or need scientific information in the future. Knowing they can call you will help solidify your relationship with the office.
- Do NOT involve politics. While it is good to know your Member’s background and stance on these important issues, support for biomedical research is a bipartisan issue and historically receives widespread support. Moreover, once elected, a Member’s political affiliation is less

important than the substantive issue you are advocating. Regardless of who wins an election, we must work with the elected official. By keeping politics out of the discussion, you can maintain a professional and substantive discussion with an office that is a potential ally in your goals.

- Always thank the staff for their time and, if appropriate, try to get a photo of your meeting (in-person or virtual).
 - If you do end up with a photo, please send it to Michael Heintz, mheintz@acadrad.org and Casey Cappelletti (ccappelletti@acadrad.org), along with the names of those participating.
 - Consider tweeting about your meeting and tagging the Academy (@Acadrad).
- Fill out the Academy's Congressional Meeting Follow-up form.
 - The Academy can send you a simple form for capturing relevant meeting information both for your records and for returning to the Academy.
 - Once completed, email this form to mheintz@acadrad.org so that the Academy may track the meetings and provide additional follow-up as needed.

Follow-up:

Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up! The entire goal of these meetings is to cultivate long-term relationships with your Members of Congress, and this successful first introduction is just step one.

Some steps for effective follow-up:

- Send a **thank you email** ASAP to the person you met with (see below for an example). And if you met with an elected official, email the aide that was there to thank them and extend your gratitude to the Member.
 - If they asked questions you could not answer in the meeting, or if they asked for follow-up information, include it in your thank you message.
 - Links to articles, pdfs, etc. seem to get past the Hills' firewall better than attachments. If an email is too large in file size, it will get flagged and make it more difficult for staff to view.
- Send the office periodic updates on your work. If you made a noteworthy discovery, received a new grant, or received some other form of recognition, send a note to the office. Or ask the Academy to send one on your behalf.
- Thank them for taking action on issues you care about. The Academy makes email templates available for emailing the office, and social media tags and letters-to-the-editor of your local newspaper are good options as well.
- Sign up for the office's newsletter and follow them on social media to keep current on their work and efforts. For more information on our newsletter how to engage with the Academy via social media contact Casey Cappelletti, ccappelletti@acadrad.org.

If your meeting was online this time, it may be in-person next time. Setting the groundwork with virtual meetings will only enhance the likelihood of getting an in-person meeting during our annual MedTech event in Washington, DC, and will help you to make a lasting impression on the office overall.

Example of a "thank you" email:

"Good afternoon NAME,

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me **ON DATE** about my research at **INSTITUTION** and the importance of increased and sustained funding for NIH.

As a constituent, I am encouraged to see the interest you showed in biomedical research and our work. As you saw, imaging research, such as **REFERENCE TO RESEARCH DISCUSSED**, and NIH's efforts more broadly are crucial to advancing our understanding of **CONDITIONS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE MEETING**. As a reminder, I would ask **MEMBER** to support an increase to NIH funding by \$3.177 Billion to at least \$46.111 Billion for FY22 and to increase NIBIB funding by \$30.4 Million to at least \$441.1 Million for FY22.

If there is additional information I can provide, or if I can be a resource to your office in the future, please contact me at your convenience.

Thank you again for your time and I look forward to speaking with your office in the future. Have a great day.

Best,
NAME
AFFILIATION
CONTACT INFORMATION”

- Thank you tweets and tagging the office are also effective tools (also tag @acadrad). See below for more tips on social media engagement. The Academy can help find Twitter handles if they are not immediately available. An example:

“Thanks **@MOCOFFICE** for meeting today to discuss the importance of **@NIH** and biomedical imaging research! **@acadrad**”

Social Media & Advocacy

Most offices are active on social media, specifically Twitter, with offices closely monitoring tweets they are tagged or mentioned in. When you have these meetings, especially in-person with photo opportunities, be sure to make your voice on social media heard.

Some Tips for Twitter:

- Attach all photos and tag Member offices.
 - Ask staff if they mind being in the photo before you take it (occasionally, some staff do not wish to be pictured on social media). If the Member is in the meeting always ask for a picture.
- #Hashtag anything you can! If you are mentioning research terms specifically, this really helps to highlight them. (for example, #MRI, #Breast, #Lung, #Screening, #Imaging, #Research etc.).
- Tag the Academy! @Acadrad
- Tag anyone else you feel is important, like your university, department, lab, Chair, colleagues on the project with you, or an NIH Institute or Center you are connected with (i.e., NIH @NIH, or NIBIB @NIBIBgov).

Have fun!

While a first-time meeting makes people nervous, these are generally enjoyable experiences and conversation. Offices enjoy speaking directly with their constituents and learning what you care about. Always feel free to contact the Academy staff with any question. **You are the voices for imaging research, speak up!**



Key Terms Glossary

- **Act** – Legislation that has passed both houses of Congress, is signed by the president (or not vetoed within 10 days) and becomes law.
- **Amendment** – A change in a bill or document by adding, substituting, or omitting portions of it. Action on amendments can be taken at the subcommittee, at the full committee, or on the floor.
- **Appropriations Bill** – Annual legislation that provides actual funds for authorized programs.
- **Authorization Bill** – Legislation establishing a program and setting funding limits. An authorized funding level does not indicate the amount of actual funds appropriated. For example, the Math Science Partnership was authorized at \$450 million in FY2002, yet was appropriated \$12.5 million for that fiscal year. These bills can be multi-year authorizations reliant on annual appropriations.
- **Briefing** – A session sponsored by members of Congress or a caucus to inform the public, the media, advocates, and others about an issue, legislation, or the status of legislation.
- **Caucus** – An affinity group for like-minded Representatives or Senators to advance policy on a specific topic. Examples include the Congressional Black Caucus, the Medical Technology Caucus, the Rare Disease Caucus, and the Veterinary Medicine Caucus.
- **Continuing Resolution (CR)** – Legislation that provides temporary appropriations for specific activities when Congress did not enact an appropriations bill prior to the start of the fiscal year. Typically, a CR continues operations at 90% of the prior year funding level.
- **Filibuster** – Procedure in the Senate where a Member intentionally delays a vote by indefinitely continuing debate on a bill. A 60-vote “cloture” is needed to force the end of debate and vote.
- **Fiscal Year** – Federal accounting year occurring from October 1 to September 30 of the following calendar year. If new appropriations legislation is not passed by October 1 of each year a CR will be needed to maintain government operations.
- **Hearing** – A committee session in which witnesses are called to testify under oath about a particular issue. Hearings are usually conducted at the subcommittee level first in order to determine whether the issue or bill in question should be taken up in the full committee.
- **Minibus OR Omnibus** – combining multiple appropriations bills to pass in one vote.
- **Ranking Members** – The most senior member of the minority party on a committee. In the Senate, these may also be known as “Vice Chairs.”
- **Whip** – Assistant leader for each party in each chamber who keeps other members of the party informed of the legislative agenda of the leader. The whip also monitors the sentiment among party members for certain legislation and tries to persuade members to be present and vote for measures important to the party leadership.

Common Acronyms

- **CBO** – Congressional Budget Office
- **CJS** – Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee (House and Senate)
- **HAC** – House Appropriations Committee
- **HELP** – Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
- **HOB** – House Office Building (Canon, Longworth, Rayburn)
- **LHHS or Labor-H** – Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee (House and Senate)
- **OMB** – White House Office of Management and Budget
- **OSTP** – White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
- **SAC** – Senate Appropriations Committee
- **SOB** – Senate Office Building (Dirksen, Russell, Hart)