Setting appointments with your legislators is the first and most important step you can take to fully participate in EdTA Advocacy Day. Making appointments is not as hard as you might think, but it may require patience and repeated efforts. Here are five steps to help you succeed.

1. Do some homework.

Before you begin making appointments, you need to do some research. You likely already know who your two Senators are but perhaps are less certain about your House Representative. Visit OpenStates and enter your address—the page will list both your federal and state legislators. From there, Google each legislator and visit their websites. In most instances, you will be able to quickly determine:

- party affiliation, district (for House reps)
- committees they serve on
- name, email, and phone number of the legislator’s staff director, assistant, or scheduler responsible for responding and setting constituent meeting appointments.

To help you more efficiently make a connection to the right staffer, visit our Senate and House Scheduler Lists included in your digital Prep Work folder.

Take note if your ...

- Senators are members of the House Education and Labor Committee (HELP).
- Representative belongs to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (L-HHS-Education Appropriations) Committee.
- Senators are members of the Cultural Caucus.
- Representative is a member of the Congressional Arts Caucus.

The two committees have responsibility for proposing legislation and appropriations for education and arts related agencies, such as the National Endowment for the Arts; if your Senator or House representative serves on of these committees, they have elevated influenced on the legislative appropriations that you are likely to address in your meeting. While the Cultural and Arts Caucuses have no decision-making authority, membership in these groups will give you some indication that your Congress person is arts supportive.

2. Choose your contact strategy.

You can make your appointment three ways:

- Going to the legislator’s website and filling out an online meeting request form.
- Sending an email to the designated scheduler.
- Calling the designated scheduler.

Every legislator’s office handles things a bit differently, so you may find that one or another of these three strategies works best. Most legislators’ websites include a form to make a request for a meeting. You can start with that approach, but if you don’t get a response within a few days, you should reach out by either email or phone to the designated scheduler or education staffer. Your Prep Work folder includes an Education Staffer contact list.

3. Prepare an email/phone script.

You know all about theatre, right? So you know how to prepare a script. Write out your email or phone script in advance and be prepared to adapt it to who you are, the EdTA “asks,” and who you are reaching out to. Here’s a sample script you can adapt:
“Hello, my name is __________. I am a member of the Educational Theatre Association/International Thespian Society, the national voice of school theatre education. We represent 80,000 students and more than 5,500 educators throughout the country and abroad. My state chapter in _______ includes _______ adult members and _______ students. As the director/a member of Troupe _______ and a theatre educator, my colleagues and I/fellow Thespians are visiting Capitol Hill July 19 to advocate on behalf of theatre education. As you know, education has faced many challenges in the past few years—the pandemic, funding cuts, concerns over curriculum and more. Like other curricular subject areas, theatre is working hard to re-engage students who lost precious learning time during the height of COVID. We would like to meet with Sen./Rep. _______ or a staff member to talk about how federal support in the appropriations process for arts education can help theatre education continue to rebuild our programs and ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to participate in our discipline as part of their well-rounded education.”

4. Try again.

Don’t be afraid to be persistent. If your first email effort or phone call (you may have to leave a message) proves unsuccessful, try again, perhaps reaching out to a different staff member.

Some important points:

- Legislators are very busy; don’t be disappointed if your appointment is with a staff member. It’s their job to meet with constituents and report back to their boss.
- If you can’t get an appointment on Advocacy Day don’t give up. Consider reaching out and setting up a meeting in the future with your House Representative back in your home district and perhaps with your Senator as well, depending on the locale of their state office.
- Alternately if an in-person meeting is not possible, ask if a virtual meeting might be arranged in the future when it’s convenient for the legislator or their staff. These meetings will likely be longer and be equally or even more productive than a D.C. office visit.
- Once you do make contact, whether you secure an appointment or not, offer to send digital copies of your leave-behind folder documents via email.

5. Visit the legislator’s office even if you didn’t get a meeting.

Suppose you don’t score an advance appointment for Advocacy Day, but you’re in Washington, D.C., and you have a folder that details EdTA’s Federal Support Request and important facts about the value of theatre education. You are a constituent and a voter; it’s your right to stop by the legislator’s office and present that folder at the front desk. Ask that it be passed on to the education staff member (it will help to know their name). Say “thank you” and be on your way—job well done.