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Interior background image: Ceiling of Cannon House Office Building rotunda.
Photo by Architect of the Capitol.
INTRODUCTION

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) is the largest national interdisciplinary research association devoted to the scientific study of education and learning.

Founded in 1916, AERA’s mission is to:

- Advance knowledge about education
- Encourage scholarly inquiry related to education
- Promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good

AERA exemplifies and promotes the highest standards of research through its code of ethics, its high-quality merit review process, and its published guidelines for the field, such as the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. AERA fosters innovation in research and learning, builds research capacity, and connects high-quality research with practice and policy. The association serves as a trusted source of guidance and information.
AERA GOVERNMENT RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

AERA monitors and engages with a wide range of federal issues affecting education research and the promotion of sound research policy.

During the appropriations process, AERA advocates for funding for education research across federal agencies, focusing on the Department of Education, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the National Institutes of Health. AERA provides testimony to the appropriations committees and sends letters and signs on to community letters regarding funding levels.

In spring of 2015, AERA inaugurated AERA Hill Days, organizing a small delegation of strategically selected AERA members who participated in two days of visits to federal agencies and congressional offices. These visits were timed to coincide with the beginning of the appropriations process.

In addition, AERA monitors and works to influence legislation that authorizes agencies of interest or affects the rigor or reliability of education data and statistics. AERA weighs in on regulatory and policy issues by submitting comments to and otherwise communicating with agency officials to promote education research.

For issues of central importance to education research, AERA issues action alerts, urging our members to communicate with their representatives in Congress on specific legislation. Articles in the monthly AERA Highlights e-newsletter keep AERA members informed about legislative and agency happenings.

Throughout the year we bring attention to important education research through Congressional briefings and Hill visits with AERA members who have expertise in policy-relevant areas.
Why We Need Your Help

Members of Congress and their staffs are always interested in hearing from their constituents. As a constituent, you can explain how proposed legislation or funding cuts to specific agencies play out in your home state. As an education researcher, you can most effectively explain what it is like to apply for a federal grant, conduct research, or have your findings reach a broader audience.

In a survey by the Congressional Management Foundation, 97 percent of Congressional staff said that constituent visits have “some” or “a lot” of influence on an undecided member—more than any other strategy for communicating with Congress.¹

By supporting the advocacy efforts of AERA you are helping to promote the field of education research. When representing AERA, we encourage you to consider the importance of advocating for the field and for the research and science policies that support it. While you are likely to have well informed insights about education legislation, when representing AERA please remember our mission as a research organization and that, in general, we do not advocate on education policy issues beyond how they relate to education research.

AERA Advocacy and Outreach Partners

AERA works with a broad community of organizations, coalitions, and individuals who care deeply about the future of education research.

AERA is a leading member of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS), and Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences (FABBS).

AERA also is actively engaged in numerous coalitions that advocate for federal funding and specific issues affecting education research. Coalitions include Census Project, Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF), Committee for Education Funding (CEF), Friends of the Institute of Education Sciences

¹ http://www.congressfoundation.org/projects/communicating-with-congress/face-to-face
(FIES), Friends of the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and STEM Education Coalition.

We also work side-by-side with our colleagues at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association of American Universities, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.

In addition, we work directly with federal agencies and congressional colleagues to support education research.

**CONGRESS 101**

As Senate staffers enjoy reminding visitors, the House and Senate are very different bodies. The Senate, or upper chamber, comprises 100 members, with two senators representing each state. Senators serve six-year terms with staggered elections, so one third of the Senate is up for reelection every two years. The longer serving senator from each state is known as the senior senator and the more recent arrival as the junior senator. The Senate alone is responsible for confirming high-level federal positions (such as Cabinet secretaries and the director of IES) and ratifying treaties.

The vice president of the United States presides over the Senate but may vote only in case of a tie. In the vice president’s absence, the president pro tempore, who is selected by the chamber (typically the most senior member of the majority party), assumes those duties. At the beginning of every congressional term, members of each party elect majority and minority leaders, who manage their party’s legislative agenda.

The House of Representatives, known as the lower chamber or “the people’s house,” has 435 members, each representing a single congressional district. Districts are allocated to states in proportion to their populations, with a guarantee of at least one district per state. Currently, seven states have one representative in Congress. Members of the House serve two-year terms; thus the entire chamber is up for reelection every two years. The House is responsible for choosing the U.S. president if the Electoral College is tied. In addition, all spending bills must originate in the House.

Members elect a speaker of the house at the start of every term to preside over the chamber. As in the Senate, House members elect majority and minority leaders to guide each party’s legislative agenda.
THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS
HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

**Senate**

A member of the Senate or House of Representatives introduces a bill, which is given a number (e.g., S. 58 or H.R. 1427) and assigned to the appropriate committee or subcommittee.

**Subcommittee Work**

If the bill is referred to a subcommittee, the subcommittee may hold hearings to inform members’ consideration of the bill. It may also conduct a “markup,” in which members can revise the bill’s language through amendments. The subcommittee will vote to approve the bill and send it to the full committee.

**Committee Work**

The full committee may also hold hearings and make changes to the bill. If the committee approves the bill, it will be reported to the full chamber and placed on the legislative calendar. The bill “dies” if it does not receive a majority of the committee’s votes, or if the committee fails to vote on it before the legislative term ends.

**Senate Leadership**

In the Senate, the majority leader determines when a bill will be considered. The House Rules Committee determines when and how a bill will be debated on the House floor.

**Floor Debate & Vote**

The bill is debated on the floor of the chamber in which it was introduced. The Senate does not have rules limiting debate on bills. This allows senators to filibuster a bill by prolonging debate as a stalling tactic. A filibuster can be ended if the Senate invokes cloture, which requires a two-thirds vote. The Senate also allows amendments to be proposed regardless of their relevance to the bill. In the House, the rules on debate are much stricter; the time allowed for debate is limited and amendments must be germane to the bill under consideration.

If the bill passes, it moves to the floor of the other chamber for a vote. Often the House and Senate work on different versions of the same bill concurrently. If the bills passed by the House and Senate differ, a conference committee is formed to negotiate a final product.

**Conference Committee Work**

A conference committee, comprised of members of both the House and Senate, works to adjudicate differences in the versions of the bill passed by each chamber. This process is called “reconciliation.” Both chambers must approve the revised, identical versions of the bill.

**President**

The reconciled bill is sent to the president for his/her signature, which turns the bill into law. If the president does nothing, the bill becomes law after ten days. If he/she vetoes the bill, it returns to Congress. If two-thirds of each chamber vote in favor of the bill, the veto is “overridden,” and the bill becomes law.
Committees

Because much of the work of developing and refining legislation happens within congressional committees and subcommittees, it is particularly important to reach members serving on committees with jurisdiction over education research. Committees are led by a chair (from the majority party) and the ranking member (from the minority). Most members of Congress sit on multiple committees. The following pages provide an overview of the committees most relevant for education research.

House Committees

House Committee on Appropriations

CHAIR
Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ)

RANKING MEMBER
Rep. Nita M. Lowey (D-NY)

The House Appropriations Committee is responsible for crafting legislation that funds the federal government each year. This legislation is divided into 12 individual funding bills, each of which is assigned to a designated subcommittee. These subcommittees review the president’s annual budget request, hear testimony from federal agency officials and outside witnesses, and draft legislation that will fund their respective agencies for the coming fiscal year. Key subcommittees for AERA: Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS); Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-H).

NOTE: NOTIFY YOUR UNIVERSITY

When you visit your congressional member and staff, you must let your government relations office at your university know that you are doing so. They can be a good resource and can be helpful in scheduling a meeting. In some cases, they will need to report your visit as part of lobbying disclosures required to be filed by institutions that meet the criteria to be classified as a lobbying organization.
The House Committee on Education and the Workforce has jurisdiction over public education programs (including early childhood, primary, secondary, and adult education) and programs affecting the labor market, such as pensions, job training, employee benefits, and worker health and safety. It oversees the Departments of Education and Labor.

Key subcommittees for AERA: Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education; Higher Education and Workforce Training

The House Science Committee has jurisdiction over the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and over energy research, environmental research, and other scientific research and development. The House Science Committee and, specifically, its Research and Technology subcommittee are responsible for passing the legislation that authorizes the National Science Foundation.

Key subcommittee for AERA: Research and Technology
**Senate Committees**

**Senate Committee on Appropriations**

The Senate Appropriations Committee is responsible for crafting legislation that funds the federal government each year. This legislation is divided into 12 individual funding bills, each of which is assigned to a designated subcommittee. The subcommittees review the president’s annual budget request, hear testimony from federal agency officials and outside witnesses, and draft legislation that will fund their respective agencies for the coming fiscal year.

*Key subcommittees for AERA: Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS); Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-H)*

**Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

The Senate HELP Committee legislates on issues affecting the agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services (including the National Institutes of Health) and the Department of Education (including the Institute of Education Sciences).

*Key subcommittee for AERA: Children and Families*
The Senate Science Committee has jurisdiction over all matters relating to science and technology, oceans policy, transportation, communications, and consumer affairs. This committee, and specifically the Science and Space Subcommittee, is responsible for passing the legislation that authorizes the National Science Foundation.

Key subcommittee for AERA: Science and Space

COMMUNICATING WITH CONGRESS

There are a number of ways to reach out to your members of Congress:

- Meeting in person with your member or the member’s staff, in Washington or in your home district
- Writing to your member through postal mail or email
- Calling your member’s office
- Engaging with your member’s office on social media (see more on p. 15)

In-Person Meetings

In-person meetings with members and staff can be one of the most effective forms of advocacy. You can set up a meeting either in the member’s office in Washington, D.C., or in the local district office. Consult the AERA Advocacy Center (http://cqrcengage.com/aeraedresearch/AERAAvacacyToolkit) for a sample meeting request.
Crafting Your Message
No matter what method you choose, knowing ahead of time what you want to say and how to say it will make your advocacy most effective.

The Ask
The first thing you need to determine is what you are asking your member to do, whether increasing funding for IES, voting down amendments that interfere with the peer review process at NSF, or reaching out to colleagues to raise concerns about student data privacy. This is called your “ask” and should be front and center in your advocacy message.

Do Your Homework: Know Thy Member
Find out what committee the member is on, what issues he or she cares about, where he or she went to school, and make connections. Consult member profiles provided by AERA for this information.

Framing: Lives and Money
Next, you should be prepared to explain why the member should take action. You can highlight examples from your own work or other federally funded education research, but be sure to tie the findings to real-world problems. A particularly effective approach is to relate implications of research to (a) saving or improving lives or (b) saving money. For example, under the first category you could discuss research that touches on STEM education. Under the second category you could cite research that focuses on improving government efficiency and effectiveness, generating revenue, creating jobs, or assisting decision making.

Keep It Local
Whenever possible, try to relate your discussion to your member’s state or district and the people whose interests he or she was elected to represent. You can talk about the federal research dollars going to district universities, the impact of research findings on the local economy, or improvements to local programs that are the result of evidence-based policy making.
Guide to Congressional Staff

CHIEF OF STAFF
The most senior staff in a member’s office, the chief of staff reports directly to the member and is responsible for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. He or she is also in charge of overall office operations, including assigning work and supervising the staff.

LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR (LD)
The legislative director monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations to the member on the pros and cons of each issue.

LEGISLATIVE AIDE/ASSISTANT (LA) or LEGISLATIVE CORRESPONDENT (LC)
Legislative aides, assistants, and correspondents are assigned to work on a portfolio of issues related to the member’s responsibilities and interests. LAs and LCs assist with research and accompany the member to meetings and hearings. They are also the staff members often assigned to meet with constituent and interest groups.

PRESS SECRETARY/COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
The press secretary builds and maintains open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/her constituency, and the general public. He or she works with both print and electronic media to promote the member’s views or positions on specific issues.

SCHEDULER
The scheduler maintains the member’s calendar and is responsible for allocating the member’s time for hearings, meetings, staff responsibilities, and constituent requests.

General Message Delivery Tips

Telling a Personal Story
The most important thing to remember in developing and delivering a message for your elected official is that you have something of value to contribute. In fact, you are one of the most important people the member of Congress or his staff person will see that day. Why? Because you are a constituent and/or you represent concerns of constituents.

Your job in your meeting is not to spew forth as many facts and figures as you can about your issue. Rather, your job is to make it real for the staff person. You can achieve that goal by telling a personal story.
Think about it: there’s some reason why you’ve decided to be an advocate on your issues. It likely impacts you directly in some deeply personal way. That’s the message you need to relay to your elected officials.

They will get the facts, figures, and statistics from your talking papers, as well as the national organization. What you bring to the table is a compelling story about the impact of policy issues on people that the member of Congress represents.

Here are some questions/ideas to help you develop your personal story:

- Why did you sign up for the AERA Hill Visits?
- How do the issues you are discussing impact you directly? (Do they cost you money? Do they impact your ability to do your job?)
- Do you have colleagues that can offer a compelling story?
- How do these people and others connect to the Congress member’s district?

Take a few minutes to weave these questions into a story/anecdote.

Being a Resource

In addition to telling a personal story, your other job is to act as a resource for the Congressional office. There is no way you are going to be able to relay everything you know about your issues in one 15-minute meeting. What you really want to convey is that you know a great deal about the issues you are there to discuss and, in particular, you know a great deal about how your issues impact people in the district or state. Because they must, by necessity, be generalists, congressional staffers are always turning to trusted outside experts to gain a better understanding. If you are an expert in your field, let your congressional office know that you are available to answer any questions they may have.
10 Tips for Effective Messages

You need to deliver your message in a way that will make members of Congress and their staff sit up and take notice. In addition to the approaches noted above, following are 10 tips that will help your message stand out among the hundreds who pour into congressional offices every day.

Tip #1: Always Identify Yourself
Let your elected officials know how you are connected to the district or state they represent. While you are going as part of AERA, that will mean less to them than that you vote for the member. The elected official and staff will be more likely to focus on your issues if they know how they relate to their constituents.

Tip #2: Leave Behind Materials
AERA will provide you with some basic materials about AERA to leave behind. In addition, be sure to leave your business card clipped to the informational materials. Elected officials and their staff may not remember that you are affiliated with AERA.

Tip #3: Be Specific
Too often congressional offices receive vague, unspecific comments like “we should support education research” or “the Nation’s Report Card is important.” These types of messages usually receive a very pro-forma response, something along the lines of, “Gee thanks, I’ll keep your views in mind.” To be more effective, you must ask your representative to do something specific related to your position. We will provide you with a one-pager with the specific budget amounts we support for federal agencies important to AERA.

Tip #4: Prioritize Your Requests
If you ask for too many things without making it clear what your top priorities are, the congressional office you’re talking to may feel overwhelmed and unable to identify a few key areas on which to expend limited staff resources. Let the office know what action needs the most attention in the short term.

Tip #5: Don’t Vilify Your Opponents
Or, at the very least, you should refrain from labeling those who disagree with you as unenlightened idiots—even if they are. Try to take it one step further,
and grant the credibility of opposing views. If you do so, congressional staff is more likely to believe that you have developed your position based on careful evaluation of the facts. This is not to say that you shouldn’t feel passionately about our position. However, you don’t want to leave staff with the impression that your stand is purely emotional.

Tip #6: Be Polite
You get more bees with honey than with vinegar. That applies to your dealings with people in congressional offices as well. During your meetings, you should always be polite. Treating the staff poorly will not further our cause. Even though you may be frustrated with government, it is not the fault of the staffer you are meeting with.

Tip #7: Be Patient
You should not expect an immediate response to your comments or concerns. In many cases, the issue may be one that the member has not yet formed an opinion about. That said, it is perfectly appropriate to ask when you should call back to see if the member has taken a position. In fact, if you make it clear you’re going to follow up, they will be far more likely to focus on your “ask.”

Tip #8: Don’t Make Ultimatums
The statement “if he/she doesn’t agree with me on this issue, I won’t vote for them” carries very little weight in a congressional office. For every person making that statement on one side of any issue, there is often another person making the same statement on the other side. Frankly, it is impossible to satisfy people who base their decisions on only one issue, and most congressional offices won’t bend over backwards to try.

Tip #9: Always Tell the Truth
Congressional staff turn to outside individuals for advice and assistance on important policy issues all the time. They must feel that they can trust the individuals with whom they are dealing.

Tip #10: Don’t Talk About the Campaign With Staff
Most congressional staff get very nervous when people with whom they are meeting, from lobbyists to constituents, mention the member’s campaign. Some
staffers may actually be offended. The laws against staff involvement in their member’s campaign are very strict and wandering into any gray area can put both the member and the staff person at risk of violating federal election laws. Penalties range from fees to jail time. In particular, any suggestion that the staff person’s help on a legislative issue may translate into a big campaign contribution is strictly forbidden. It is illegal, unethical, and immoral for the congressional office to take specific actions in exchange for campaign contributions. Such a suggestion may, in fact, make a staff person avoid helping you because they are worried it would look bad for their boss.

Social Media

You are encouraged to share your experience on the Hill on social media, whether by including the handle of a member of Congress in a thank-you tweet or posting photos. Congressional staffers are happy to take photos with those who come to visit. While many offices prohibit taking photos while inside a congressional office, you may take photos next to the Member’s name plate just outside of his or her office. AERA’s handle is @AERA_EdResearch.

Some suggested hashtags for social media posts:

#AERAontheHill
#FundEdResearch

SECURITY ON CAPITOL HILL

All visitors to congressional office buildings must go through security. Plan ahead and leave extra time for this as there can be a wait. You never know whether a tour bus will arrive moments before you.

You will be required to pass your items through an X-ray machine and walk through a metal detector. You will not have to remove your shoes but will need to remove your coat and empty your pockets.
Senate Office Buildings

Senators’ offices are located in three buildings on the northeast side of the Capitol: Russell, Dirksen, and Hart. The Russell and Dirksen buildings are connected by a tunnel on the basement level. Dirksen and Hart are connected by stairways on each level. Food and coffee shops are located in the basement of Russell and Dirksen and on the ground-floor connecting corridor between Dirksen and Hart. The closest Metro stop is Union Station on the red line.
NOTE: PROHIBITED ITEMS ON THE HILL

- Liquid, including water
- Food or beverages of any kind, including fruit and unopened packaged food
- Aerosol containers
- Non-aerosol spray (Prescriptions for medical needs are permitted.)
- Any pointed object, e.g. knitting needles and letter openers (Pens and pencils are permitted.)
- Any bag larger than 18” wide x 14” high x 8.5” deep
- Electric stun guns, martial arts weapons or devices
- Guns, replica guns, ammunition, and fireworks
- Knives of any size
- Mace and pepper spray
- Razors and box cutters
- Gift-wrapped items

House Office Buildings

Members of the House of Representatives have offices in one of three buildings—Cannon, Longworth, and Rayburn—located on the south side of the Capitol. The buildings are connected by a tunnel that runs through the basement level. If you need a quick caffeine boost or a place to sit between meetings, the buildings have coffee shops and cafeterias on the lower levels. The Ford building, which is a five-minute walk from Rayburn, houses some committee staff. The closest Metro stop is Capitol South on the blue, orange, and silver lines for all buildings except Ford, which is closest to Federal Center SW.
1. **CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING**
   27 Independence Ave. SE
   Bounded by Independence Ave. SE (north), First St. SE (east), C St. SE (south), and New Jersey Ave. SE (west)
   Main entrance: Corner of Independence Ave. and New Jersey Ave.

2. **LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING**
   9 Independence Ave. SE
   Bounded by Independence Ave. SE (north), New Jersey Ave. SE (east), C St. SE (south), and S. Capitol St. SE (west)
   Main entrance: Independence Ave.

3. **RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING**
   45 Independence Ave. SW
   Bounded by Independence Ave. SE (north), S. Capitol St. SE (east) C St. SE (south), and First St. SW (west)
   Main entrance: Independence Ave.

4. **FORD HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING**
   441 D St. SW
   Bounded by D St. SW (north), Second St. SW (east), Virginia Ave. SW (south), and Third St. SW (west)
   Main entrance: Second St.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Available at the AERA Advocacy Center
http://cqrcengage.com/aeraedresearch/AERAAdvocacyToolkit

Advocacy Training
- AERA Advocacy Handbook (PDF)
- Webinar slides

Advocacy Toolkit
- Step-by-step guide to meetings in the district
- Sample meeting request
- Meeting script
- Sample thank-you note
- Sample Member visit/appearance request
- Meeting notes form

Agency Fact Sheets
- Institute of Education Sciences
- National Science Foundation

State Fact Sheets
- Available for 32 states