



Advocacy Made Simple – YOU are the Best Advocate for Your Facility

Introduction to Advocating for AZA-accredited Facilities

A vital part of AZA's federal government affairs strategy is the continuing education of all Members of Congress about the value of AZA-accredited facilities, the vital role they play in animal welfare and care, conservation, education, recreation, tourism, job creation, and collectively as major contributors to the economy. Strengthening these relationships is vital to assuring that zoos and aquariums will be viewed as trusted sources of information.

What is government affairs?

AZA represents the interests of AZA-accredited facilities before Congress and federal agencies. These activities include:

- Monitoring relevant legislation and regulatory actions
- Developing policy position recommendations and strategies
- Seeking opportunities to provide testimony and comment
- Responding to federal regulatory actions
- Participating in international treaties and conventions (CITES)
- Coordinating AZA Advocacy Days and Congressional Zoo and Aquarium Caucus activities
- Building coalitions and fostering partnerships with agencies and organizations in areas of mutual interest or concern

What issues does AZA care about?

AZA works on behalf of its members on a range of issues including:

- Animal Welfare Act
- Endangered Species Act
- Marine Mammal Protection Act
- Wildlife conservation legislation
- Wildlife trafficking
- Wildlife trade
- Science education
- Federal funding opportunities

All I hear about is gridlock in Washington. Is anything actually getting done?

Legislative activity is not only defined by consideration and passage of bills...thousands of bills are introduced and hundreds of hearings are held in each Congress. These bills and hearings lay the groundwork for legislation that may pass in future years. It can often be too late to achieve significant changes on these issues if stakeholders wait until the bill is ready for consideration by either the full House or Senate. Additionally, representatives and senators often will not cosponsor legislation or take action on an issue unless they hear from their constituents about its importance to them.

Regulations are proposed and implemented regardless of specific congressional action. Therefore, just because elected officials cannot reach compromise on legislation, the executive branch agencies are likely taking an action this year that could affect you.

How is lobbying defined?

The [IRS](#) defines direct lobbying as “attempts to influence a legislative body through communication with a member or employee of a legislative body, or with a government official who participates in formulating legislation.” The IRS defines grassroots lobbying as “attempts to influence legislation by attempting to affect the opinion of the public with respect to the legislation and encouraging the audience to take action with respect to the legislation. In either case, the communications must refer to and reflect a view on the legislation.” Additional guidance from the IRS may be found [here](#).

How do I get started?

First, you should double-check what your facility’s restrictions are, if any, regarding advocacy, lobbying, and other government activities. Next, you should familiarize yourself with your legislators, on what committees they may serve, and which issues are especially important to them. Most of this information is available to you at websites including:

- [THOMAS \(The Library of Congress\)](#)
- [Legislative process video tutorials](#)
- [House of Representatives](#)
- [Senate](#)
- [White House](#)

Please visit the [AZA Legislative Education Center](#) for more information about issues important to AZA and other helpful information. AZA also has a three-part webinar series about advocacy available [here](#).

How do I set up a meeting with my representative or senator?

Legislators’ schedules fill rapidly, so plan your meeting well in advance. You don’t need to travel to Washington, DC. You can meet at one of their local offices in their district or state. Representatives and senators are usually in their districts during holidays and district work periods, and often on Mondays and Fridays. You can find the congressional schedules by looking at the [House](#) and [Senate](#) websites.

If you want to meet in Washington, DC, call the office there and ask for the scheduler. You also may be able to make a meeting request via the representative’s or senator’s website. If you are meeting locally, you can call the state or district office. If the office offers a meeting with a staffer, take it. Congressional staffers are very influential. You also should ask for the name and contact information of the policy advisor or legislative assistant (LA) working on your issues. Explain your purpose and who you represent. Be clear about any sense of urgency (budget, appropriations, legislation coming up, etc.) It is easier for congressional staff to arrange a meeting if they know exactly what you wish to discuss, who you will be bringing with

you, and why you think the Member of Congress will be interested.

Be sure to email both the scheduler and the aide working on your issue, and don't forget to follow up a few days later. Congressional offices process numerous requests a day, and staff may not notice if your request goes unanswered. After the meeting has been scheduled, forward any background materials to the relevant staffer. This also will give you the opportunity to confirm the schedule and who else will be in attendance. After the meeting, be sure to send a follow-up note thanking the Member of Congress/staff for their time and summarizing the salient points of the meeting.

Are there other ways to get to know my legislators besides scheduling a meeting?

You can get to know your legislators and their staff in a variety of ways including:

- Invite them to special events at your institution
- Offer to host events
- Send updates to their offices and staff
- Offer to be a resource to them in your specific field
- Offer a special visit

What else do I need to know?

- Have a story to tell
- Start where they are, not where you are
- Never assume you won't get support
- A compelling message is key
- Zoos and aquariums have bipartisan support
- Keep track of who has told you that they will (or will not) support your issue
- Don't forget that public perception matters
- Remember how the process works
- Don't give in too early
- Start now

What else can I do?

- Ask for your facility to be included on the "about my district/state" page of your legislators' websites
- Check to see if your representative and senators serve on the committees relevant to your issue
- Send letters of concern on your facility's letterhead to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the committees overseeing your issues
- Submit comments during federal rulemaking processes
- Build relationships: get to know legislative assistants and committee staff and keep in touch with your regulators and inspectors
- Position yourself as a resource to legislators and their staff
- Look for opportunities to engage with agencies on mutual areas of collaborations
- Inform your elected officials about the positive impact to the local community of projects funded by federal grants
- Alert AZA about any problems or concerns with an inspection or permit application
- Invite someone at the senior management level to work with you on engaging your representatives
- Create an economic impact statement for your institution
- Consider participating in an advocacy day opportunity in Washington, DC (AZA's is held each Spring!)

Keep it local. Keep it personal. Keep it concise.

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