

The Best Way to Influence Congress, According to Staffers

If you want results, you should pay a visit to your senator's office.

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Photographer: Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg

Donald Trump's political opponents have spent [a lot of time](#) calling their senators (and other people's senators) during the first whiplash-inducing weeks of the new Administration. But does calling Congress actually work?

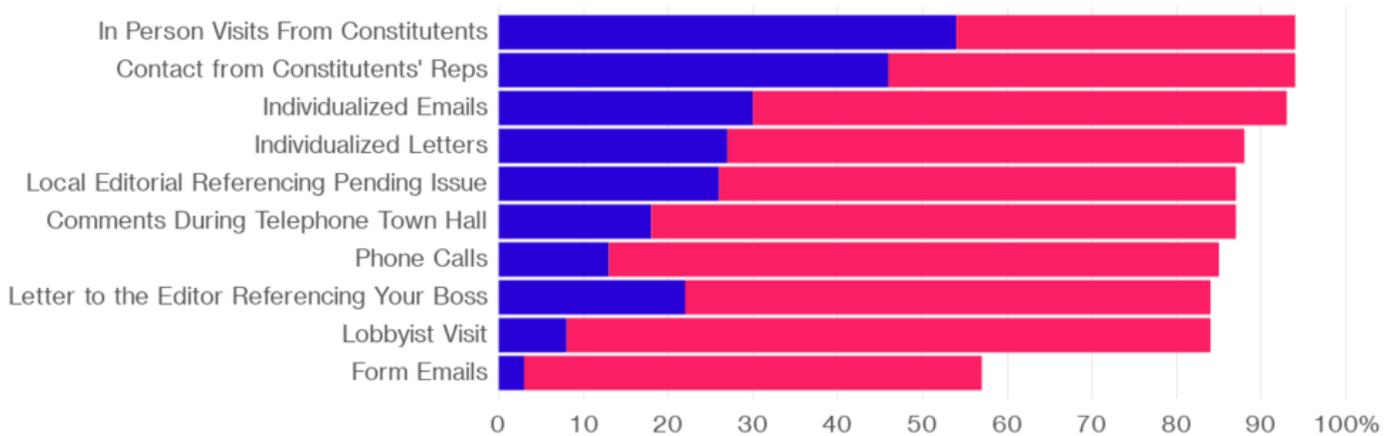
There's been a fair amount of commentary on that subject lately, from people who work for Congress, people who lobby lawmakers, and thanks to the ubiquity of social media, just about everyone else.

A new report takes a methodical approach to the question, compiling survey responses from about 1,200 Congressional staffers conducted over more than 10 years.

Want To Be Heard? Show Up!

Influence on Washington D.C.-based congressional staffers by communication type.

■ A Lot of Positive Influence ■ Some Positive Influence



Source: Congressional Management Foundation

*Bars do not add up to 100 because not all surveyed categories are displayed

Bloomberg

The top-line results: The best way to influence a member of Congress is to visit them in person; and calling their office is less effective than you might think. Instead of picking up the phone, concerned citizens should write a letter to their representative, or a letter to the editor. Email is effective, but form emails aren't.

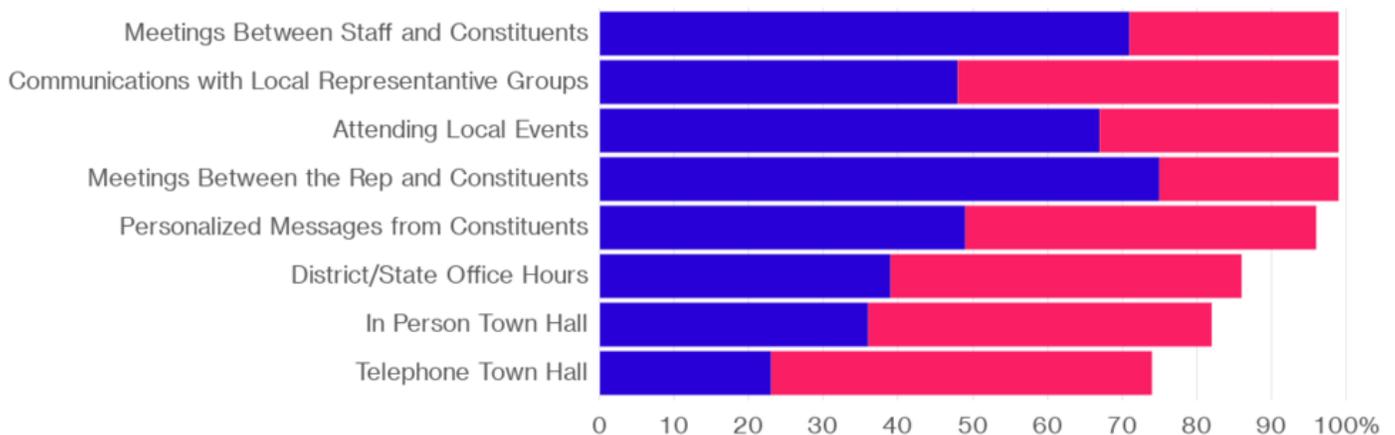
Those findings come from the Congressional Management Foundation, a nonpartisan nonprofit that has spent the last 40 years helping Congressional staff engage with their constituents, and helping citizens become more effective advocates.

The report doesn't consider the value of donating to a political candidate, partly because members of Congress maintain separate campaign offices for raising money and political messaging.

Face Time is Key for Getting Your Point Across

Best ways to help staffers understand constituents' views.

■ Very Important ■ Somewhat Important



Those surveyed highlighted the power of face-to-face interaction; it was widely viewed as important and a successful way for constituents to get their goals across to their elected officials.

And while meetings with staff and meetings with representatives are ranked first and fourth, respectively, for making constituents' points understood, they can be elusive. The halls of Congress are hundreds if not thousands of miles away for most Americans, and showing up and asking to speak to a representative doesn't guarantee anyone a conversation.

Meeting members in their home states is also an effective way to be heard, as is getting to know staffers over email or telephone. "Building a relationship with congressional staff is often the first step to effective advocacy," the report says.

Republican Representative Jason Chaffetz witnessed the power of in-person complaints earlier this month, when he was met by a sea of questions (and criticism) from a town hall audience in his home state of Utah. At one point, the crowd waiting to be let into the town hall chanted "[You work for us <https://twitter.com/jtolds/status/829876547616124929>](https://twitter.com/jtolds/status/829876547616124929) ." The crowd inside chanted "[Do your job <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/10/politics/republican-town-halls-obamacare/index.html?sr=twCNN021017republican-town-halls-obamacare0817AMStoryLink&linkId=34346762>](http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/10/politics/republican-town-halls-obamacare/index.html?sr=twCNN021017republican-town-halls-obamacare0817AMStoryLink&linkId=34346762) ."