NPMA
National Pest Management Association

NPMA GRASSROOTS RESOURCES

How to Conduct a *Virtual* Hill Meeting

Virtual Hill meetings are very similar to meeting in person, with just a few additional considerations. This guide will walk you through how to conduct a virtual Hill meeting with a group of any size.

Before the Meeting

When to arrive: A good rule of thumb is to log in to the virtual meeting room/call into the conference line approximately 5 minutes early in case you have any technical issues. Make sure that you have your one pagers or other handouts already open on your desktop or app.

- **With a group?** Decide before the policymaker arrives who will speak on which topics and in what order. Everyone may not get a chance to speak in every meeting and that's O.K. It is most important to determine who the meeting lead is; this person should function almost like an MC. They will call on speakers to ensure there is neither dead time nor multiple speakers starting at once. It is recommended to have the same group lead for all your meetings to make it easier for everyone to feel comfortable, but this is not required.

How To Present Yourself: Ensure you are in a neat, quiet place without distractions. Dress as if you were meeting in person: business attire is recommended.

Be Seen and Not Heard Unless You Are Speaking: Please mute yourself if you are not speaking. Even in a quiet area, background noise can still come through. Group leads should feel empowered to mute anyone. Test your video and sound prior to the call – can you be heard and seen? Remain on video if the policymaker is on.

At the Meeting

Introductions: Once the policymaker has logged on or called in to the meeting, introductions can begin. You should introduce yourself using the following formula: *"Hello, my name is X, and I'm with X company, located in X. We have about X employees in the district."* For example: *"My name is John Doe and I'm with JD Pest Control. We have 3 locations in your district where we employ 15 constituents."* It is important to note if you employ anyone or do work in the district; if not, emphasize any state connections. If it is a meeting of one or two NPMA members, it's ok to ask the staffer if they are from the district, or other local chit chat briefly to help break the ice, but in larger groups that isn't recommended as it cuts into time you will need to talk about issues.

- **With a group?** The group lead should introduce themselves first, and then call on people to introduce themselves. For example, the group lead calls on Joe Smith, Joe finishes, then the lead calls on Jane Smith. This ensures there aren't awkward pauses as people decide who goes next. Introductions should be short, and not include extraneous information such as reminiscing about a hometown. In a large group, speed is key for introductions, so you can get to the meeting. If you're tagging along with a group and don't have presence in the district and/or the state, it's fine to just say your name, company, and the state(s) you do business in.

Tailor Your Talking Points: Once introductions are finished, you can focus on the issue(s) you came to discuss. Keep in mind staffers may handle a vast portfolio and can be anywhere between an expert and totally unaware of your issue. It is recommended that the group lead ask something similar to the following before beginning; *"I don't know how familiar you are with X so I before I dive into the details, I wanted to check and see if you've worked [on this issue/this bill] before?"* Staffers that are familiar with the issue will tell you so, and those that aren't can say they don't know much about it. This will allow you to tailor your level of detail to their needs. You should never shame them for a lack of knowledge or imply that they should know something about your issue. Staffers juggle dozens of active policy issues at a time, so it's important to remember we are meeting with them to educate them, not to judge their lack of understanding.

The Issues: Now that you know what level of knowledge a staffer has, it's time to discuss the details. When talking about each issue you should summarize it in 3-4 sentences. More may be needed for someone who is new to the issue; if the staffer indicates they know the issue well, you can skip or condense the background. A good rule of thumb once you've given a couple sentences of background:

1. Explain in 1-3 sentences what the problem is.
2. Give 1-2 sentences about how it affects you or businesses in the industry directly.
3. Explain what solution you are proposing in 1-2 sentences.
4. Ask them their thoughts.

As you can see, this does not call for a long explanation. It is better to lay the basics out first and allow the staffer to ask questions and engage in a dialogue. Talking at a staffer for 20 minutes will not be nearly as productive as talking with a staffer for 10. If they ask questions you do not know the answer to, write them down and let them know when you'll follow up. For example, if they ask you if this issue is included in appropriations, you could say *"I'm not sure, but I/NPMA will follow up with you later this week to confirm."* Repeat this process as needed for each issue.

- **With a group?** Pick one person to cover each issue. When it comes to questions, anyone can chime in but in order to move the meeting along, it is best to have one person to explain each issue. The group lead can introduce them. For example, the group lead would give the general background, then say *"Jane is an expert on X, I'll let her explain our concerns."*

Ending the Meeting: When you've covered the issue(s) and have exhausted the discussion, you can thank the staffer(s)/Member for their time and offer to be a resource for any future questions. Make sure you have written down any questions you need to follow up on. If you are remaining on the conference line/in the online room, make sure the policymakers have signed off before discussing how the meeting went.

After the Meeting

Notes: The online meeting platform will allow you to input any feedback immediately so you can jot down impressions quickly. This will help NPMA with follow-up so please include any pertinent details.

Follow-up: You should send an email to each staffer you met with, personally thanking them for meeting with you/your group. If there were any questions you were unable to answer in person, make sure you follow up with the information, looping in NPMA staff as needed.

General Notes

Having Technical Issues? As group lead, if one of the predesignated speakers has serious audio issues (dropping words, excessive feedback, very loud background noise, or no audio at all) give them one chance to correct it quickly. If they continue to have issues, mute them and ask someone else to fill in on whatever that speaker was supposed to cover.

With A Large Group? If you are bringing in a large group (5+ people) everyone may not get a chance to speak. That's absolutely fine! Make sure constituents are noted and focus on making the strongest case possible.

Do Not:

- **Lie:** Passing along bad information will irrevocably damage your relationship with the staffer and will impact their impression of NPMA. If you don't know the answer, just say you will find out.
- **Offer a contribution:** Either to the staffer for their boss or by implying your contribution is tied to a vote. Both are strictly prohibited and will cause the meeting to end.
- **Be Disrespectful:** You will likely take a difficult meeting at some point. Perhaps the staffer disagrees with your point of view or may even be rude to you. Always remember to be professional, and if you feel like the meeting is unproductive, you can cut it short by saying *"Thank you so much for your time, I understand we may disagree on some things but I hope you'll take a look over our one pagers and let us know if we can be helpful in any way."*
- **Run Over Your Time:** Meetings are set in 30-minute blocks, and you should aim for about 15-20 minutes per meeting. If you have a large group perhaps it runs to 25, but unless explicitly told by the staffer to stay longer, you need to wrap up by the 25-minute mark. If you have not yet gotten to all issues, the group lead can say *"I know we've run a little long; I would love to send you our other issue one pagers and am happy to schedule a follow up meeting if needed."*
- **Text/Email During a Meeting:** It is obvious in online meetings if you are staring at a different part of your screen or down at your phone. Please clear your schedule during those 30-minute blocks so you can focus on the policymaker.
- **Judge a Staffer by Their Age:** The average age of a House staffer is early 20s, and the average age of a Senate staffer is late 20s. Despite their young age, they hold a great deal of influence, so please do not imply that their youth makes them incompetent, or request to speak to someone older.
- **Discuss Issues Outside of Those Pre-selected By the Group:** While it can be tempting to discuss an issue you find personally engaging, it's important that this meeting stays focused on NPMA issues.

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