

Dear World Language Advocates,

The JNCL-NCLIS Legislative Day & Delegate Assembly in Washington, D.C. is a powerful event for World Language educators, with opportunities to learn about and have an impact on the national scene. For first-time attendees, it can be overwhelming because there are so many things happening on so many levels. Below are some Frequently Asked Questions that may make your experience more enjoyable and productive at all levels. The experience is different for everyone, of course. The following FAQ's are from the perspective of a state association president who has attended several times. Thanks to J. David Edwards and Ashley Lenker for the answers! Have more questions? Ask Ashley at [programs@languagepolicy.org](mailto:programs@languagepolicy.org). Your question may help someone else.

**Q: What's the location of the event?**

**A:** This year everything takes place within walking distance of Capitol Hill. The hotel is the Washington Court Hotel. Make sure you make reservations with the hotel before March 31 to get the conference rate.

[Washington Court Hotel](#)

525 New Jersey Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20001

202.628.2100

800.321.3010

**Q: When should I arrive?**

**A:** The first event is Thursday morning, so Wednesday night arrival is recommended.

**Q: What's the schedule like? What happens when?**

**A:** BE FLEXIBLE! In Washington plans change on a moment's notice. This is the plan for events:

**Thursday morning:** Briefings on Capitol Hill by JNCL staff, congressional staffers, and possibly Members of Congress, including a simulation of a congressional visit so you will know what to expect. Please note that this year the Legislative briefings will be held in the Washington Court Hotel, which is within walking distance from the House and Senate office buildings. A few individuals may have morning appointments scheduled in a member's office. If that is the case, ask an experienced delegate for pointers on making an office visit before you go.

**Lunch:** Lunch is at the hotel, with Rep. Rush Holt as our invited guest speaker. You should have already made your lunch choice (salmon or veggie lasagna) upon registration.

**Thursday afternoon:** Appointments with legislators! The JNCL staff will make your appointments for you, as long as you have registered for the conference with them in advance. If there are several of you from your state or district, you will go together to your Senators' offices, but you may be the only one from your district visiting your Congressional office. You may meet with the legislator or a junior legislative correspondent for about 15-20 minutes, and there may be a photo op. Bring materials (see below). Be aware that if you meet with a staffer, their boss is definitely going to get the information. To feel comfortable and make the most of these congressional visits, check out [languagepolicy.org](http://languagepolicy.org) and READ everything AHEAD OF TIME.

Depending on the timing of your appointments, there is the possibility of going back to the hotel between visits. When you speak with a particularly interested staffer, make sure and invite them to the Thursday evening reception.

**Thursday evening:** Reception at the hotel. Free food, cash bar, lots of fun to talk with others about your congressional visits, meet and greet congressional staff, administrative decision-makers, and shakers and movers from other associations. Dinner on your own.

**Friday:** all day (9-5) Delegate Assembly at the hotel.

The day will begin with a debriefing of Congressional visits. It is often as interesting as the visits themselves to hear about others' experiences, both positive and negative.

Presentations and breakout sessions. Be ready to take notes and learn a lot about what's happening on the national level.

Breakout session topics

- Critical Languages
- Assuring Quality Programs
- Study Abroad and Exchanges as Language Study

Read the material ahead of time and familiarize yourself with major issues, acronyms, and commonly used terms. You will encounter an amazing amount of new information and being familiar with a few of these items will help you digest and retain more.

Friday food: continental breakfast, snacks, lunch buffet [Don't forget to RSVP!]

**Friday evening:** ACTFL reception, transportation provided! Tour the new ACTFL digs....

**Saturday morning:** All events at the hotel. JNCL/NCLIS business meeting, responsibilities for follow-up, next steps.

Lunch at noon [Remember to RSVP yes or no with your registration]

**Q: What do I need to do to make appointments with my legislators?**

**A:** The JNCL staff will make your appointments if you return the registration material to them on time (**DEADLINE: April 18**).

**IF** you are unable to register by the deadline, you should plan on visiting your congressional representatives anyway, as you may get to talk to someone and make an impression. Despite the best efforts of JNCL staff, sometimes Congressional offices do not respond to requests for meetings. If that is the case for one of your reps, visit the office anyway. Perhaps someone will be available to talk with you or at the very least, leave the materials you have brought.

**Q: What should I bring to make the most of my congressional visit?**

**A:**

- A camera (if you get a photo op with your congressman, publish it in your newsletter, send a copy to your congressman)
- business cards with good contact information
- newsletter or any other publications from your state organization - Those that show particular things happening in your state, advocacy efforts, statistics or arguments on the importance of languages are particularly good.

- a fact sheet summarizing what’s going on in your state related to world language education, with the reassurance that you are willing to be their resource and you will do research to get the answers you don’t have
- any give-aways you have representing your state association (pencils, ruler, bookmarks, etc. You want to leave something behind that will help them remember you—gifts must have a value of less than \$50.

**Q: Is there time to do sight-seeing or meet up with friends? What time does the event finish on Saturday?**

**A:** Usually with lunch on Saturday. Check the schedule, above.

**Q: What clothing should I pack?**

**A: Friday:** You will be on Capitol Hill! Dress professionally! In the morning briefings you will be sitting and learning more about what to expect from your appointments (whether with legislators or staffers). After lunch you will be walking the Hill and visiting the offices of your representatives. Ergo, on that day you want to be dressed professionally in order to make a positive impression so whoever your audience is will pay attention to you, AND you must be prepared to walk a lot, sometimes with a very short time between appointments and a lot of ground to cover, often on hard, slick, unforgiving marble. Ashley says, “Wear the fanciest flats you’ve got.” Dave says, “Wear your dress shoes with rubber soles.” Don’t forget an umbrella, just in case.

For **Saturday’s** Delegate Assembly, dress professionally, as you are meeting with the leaders in our field and you want to represent your organization well, but you won’t be doing as much walking and you can dress more casually.

Of course, check the weather for the D.C. area before departure: early May in Washington can be delicious or miserable; prepare for both. An umbrella/raincoat is good insurance.

**Q: What can I do to be prepared?**

**A:**

- Read the information they send you, silly.
- Check the JNCL/NCLIS website: [languagepolicy.org](http://languagepolicy.org).
- Familiarize yourself with the “How Legislation is Passed” document. For most of us, it’s been a long time since high school government class, and, of course, the real process is not as neat and tidy as the textbooks suggest.
- Read the latest Legislative Summary on the website again just before the conference to see what issues are on the front burner.
- Contact JNCL if you have questions.
- Look at the list of acronyms and familiarize yourself with everything.

**Q: How many people will be there? Who are they?**

**A:** Attendance at the annual Delegate Assembly is usually about 80-100. This group is comprised of official delegates and/or members of state and regional language associations as well as language-specific or level-specific organizations. See

[http://www.languagepolicy.org/membership/Member\\_Links.html](http://www.languagepolicy.org/membership/Member_Links.html) for a current list of member organizations.

**Q: Will I be expected to give a presentation?**

**A:** All delegates will receive a list of talking points: 3 or so issues that are most pertinent and that there is a need to focus on. That will give everyone a basis on which to build. If you registered early enough, you will have an appointment to speak with your Senator, Representative, or one of their staffers. Even if you don't have an appointment, you should visit their offices and undoubtedly you will have an "audience." You should be prepared to speak intelligently about the needs of our profession in terms of the following: Pending national legislation and your recommendation for what action they should take (they may or may not be aware of what's out there because there is so much expected of our legislators) AND the state of world language education in your state. This information will come directly from the talking points. "The squeaky wheel gets the grease," and if they don't know what's happening in your region, they are not likely to pay much attention. Be prepared to give a general overview of Foreign Language Education in your state---what's good and what's needed. Then be prepared to offer your services as a professional resource for that office. You may only have 5 minutes to make your case, so know what points you want to make before you arrive. If you get more time, you can always elaborate. Remember that we, the delegates, are the experts on the subject. Most importantly: make a connection and follow up with that connection. Even if it seems like nothing is happening that pertains to your state, the personal connection you make at this conference may make a big difference later. Most Congressional staffers come from your state, so find out where they went to school, if they took a language and who their teacher was. Chances are that you will know someone in common.

For these presentations, you may be all by yourself, or you may be with others from your state. For your Representative, it's likely you will go by yourself. Be prepared to speak about foreign language education in your geographical area. If you have no expertise, they will forget about you. If it's clear you know what you're talking about, they will pay attention. The late Senator Paul Simon used to say that real-life anecdotes that illustrate your point are the most effect way to get your point across and have it remembered.

**Q: What do I say to my representatives and senators?**

**A:** If you are knowledgeable about your field, all you need to do is what you do best: teach. "Legislators and staffers are intimidated by teachers," according to Dave Edwards. Briefings on Thursday morning of the visits will help, but you should put some time into preparing, just as you would to teach any important lesson. Talk about quality of education, economic competitiveness, national security, and especially what they're most interested in. "Find their hot button," Dave says. Research that hot button. Find out what other committees they're on, since that's what they already know about. See if they already co-sponsor a language bill. Google them!

**Q: My organization is paying for my registration, but everything seems so expensive. How can I save on expenses?**

**A:** If you must pay for your own lodging, use your listserv to look for others from the area who are attending. Minimize meal expenses by taking advantage of the meals and snacks provided by JNCL/NCLIS. If you are coming by yourself and don't have any contacts, contact JNCL and they can often facilitate a roommate matchup.

**Q: Who organizes all of this?**

**A:** The very small staff at JNCL/NCLIS organizes everything, in addition to the work they do on behalf of world language education throughout the year.

**Q: What if I don't agree with the position or politics of my representative?**

**A:** Tough. You're a teacher, educate them. And be nice. You may find reactions that range from hostility to indifference to active support of the issues we feel are important. Remember that Members of Congress and their staff work for you, their constituent. Be ready to back up your arguments for supporting languages with facts related to your state (# of members of the organization you represent, # of students in your school/district/state, economic statistics related to languages in your state, anecdotes about students/businesses/personal experiences that illustrate your arguments. If you encounter indifference, try to stress the crucial importance of language competence to economic competitiveness, international understanding, a quality education—whatever speaks to your listener's interests. If you have a supportive Member of Congress, thank them for their support, offer your help/expertise, ask them to co-sponsor a specific bill if they are not already a co-sponsor. Educate them about important bills coming up and ask for their support again.

**Q: What restaurants are in the area near the hotel?**

**A:** The JNCL staff is preparing a list that will be sent to registrants and/or available on the [languagepolicy.org](http://languagepolicy.org) website.

**Q: How can I get my administrator to see the value of attending this event?**

**A:** JNCL delegates are all leaders in the profession at various levels. Attending this event will allow your school/district's language programs to be highlighted to Members of Congress. Don't forget to invite them to visit your school! Politely point out that this is professional development for your field. Other subject teachers participate in conferences, etc. as well, but maybe they, by the nature of their subject/field, do not necessarily have to be so active in advocating its very importance. Also, put simply, if administrators are not in support of a language teacher actively participating in the future of his/her field, you may need to educate the administrator and lobby before you even make it to Washington, somewhat of a practice run for Legislative Day. Furthermore, it is important to return home and share what you've learned and your experiences. This will not only make you a more active language advocate by spreading the knowledge, but it will also show others that your time in Washington, DC was productive and well-spent.