Having the Conversation:
Interacting with Congressional Staff

CRA Leadership in Science Policy Institute – April 27, 2015

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Topics/Timeline for this Session

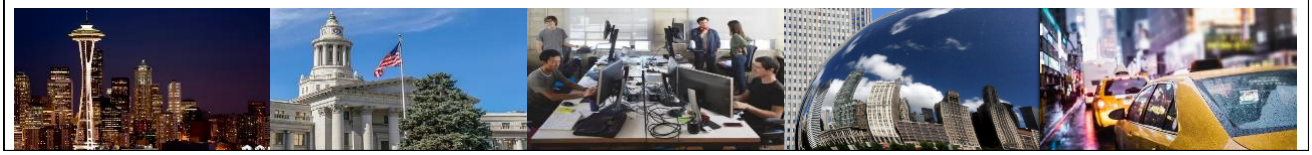
Topics

- Interacting with Congressional Staff
  - Preparing, Talking and Listening, Following-Up
  - Thinking about what to say
- Congressional Testimony

Please Interrupt

Schedule

- Today: Presentation/Discussion
- Tonight: Practice Practice Practice
- Tomorrow: Sample Interactions, with Feedback



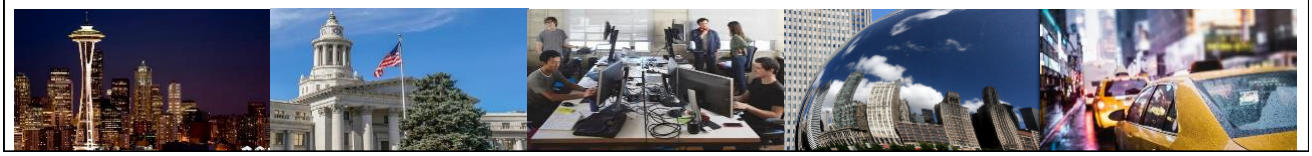
Caveats

Policy is a complex interdependent system – causality is very hard to define

- Lots of factors beyond your control (environment, timing, competing issues)
- Going it alone less effective than having allies

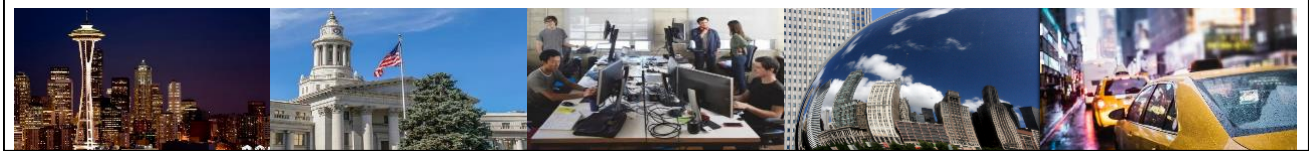
Doing good comes in a lot of different guises

- Preventing a bad outcome, softening the blow
- Piling on (adding your voice to a chorus)
- Making sure the opposition isn't unopposed
- Nuanced policy adjustments
- Raising awareness, applying pressure



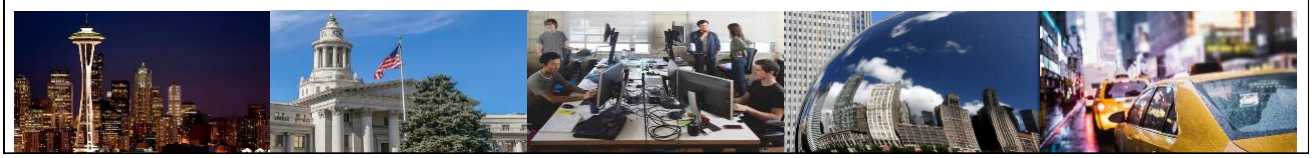
Interacting with Congressional Staff

- **Preparing**
- How to Handle Yourself
- What to Say



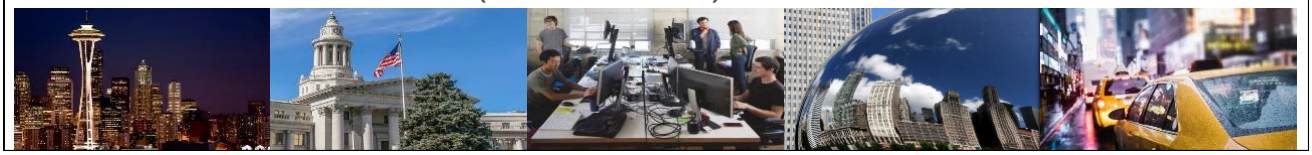
Know Your Audience (Do Your Homework on Them)

- Committee staff vs. personal staff
- Time of year, current issues/bills
- Staff's portfolio
- Member's positions/philosophy, Committee assignments, interests/priorities
- Committee's priorities, agenda, jurisdiction
- Geography



Know Your Purpose (Do Your Homework on Your Message)

- Why are you there?
- What do you hope to accomplish (know your audience)?
  - Set realistic goals: a specific ask (support or sponsor a bill or certain language), give supporters praise and additional info, raise awareness in non-supporters
- Prepare what to say ahead of time
- In a group, agree on priorities and points, and assign roles and responsibilities
- Have short handouts (for reference)



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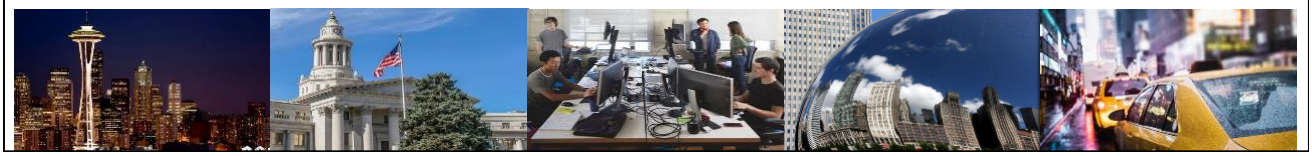
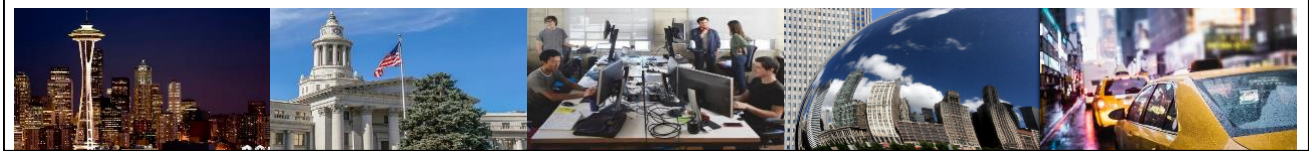


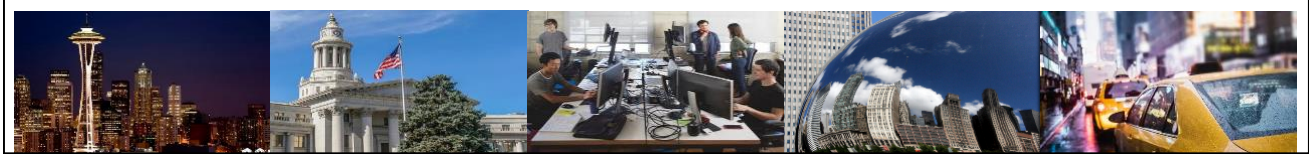
Know What to Say/Do (Part I)

- Real Words
- Real Worlds
- Anecdotes, Factoids, Myth vs. Reality
- Position yourself and the community as a resource



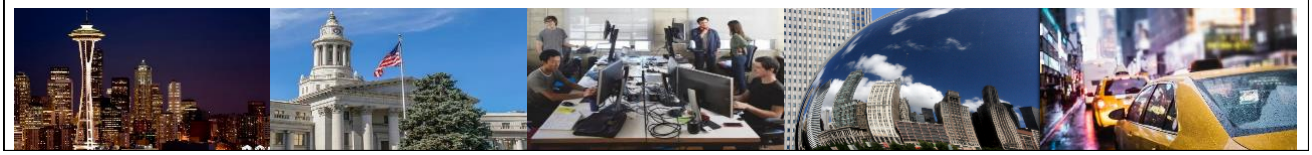
Know What to Say/Do (Part II)

- Be specific (what agencies, what programs, what policies, what issues, what bills, what ACTIONS)
- Be responsive to the questions that are asked whenever possible (see future slide)
  - Show you heard, bring it back to your topics/points
- Be to the point
  - Teasers are possible, i.e. in answering questions, can offer related topics/issues, but don't go into them without being encouraged



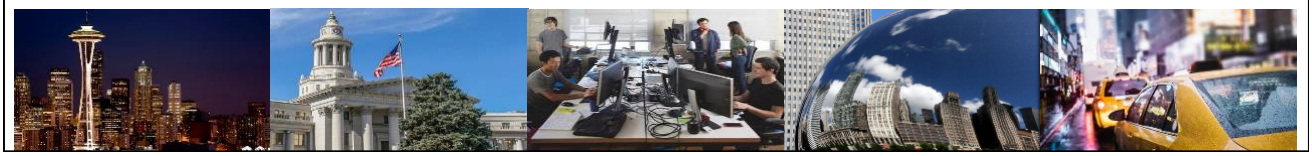
Know What to Say/Do (Part III)

- Ask how you can help, ask for others to speak to (sometimes)
- **Be respectful of their time/positions, say thank you!**
- Dress appropriately
- Be consistent



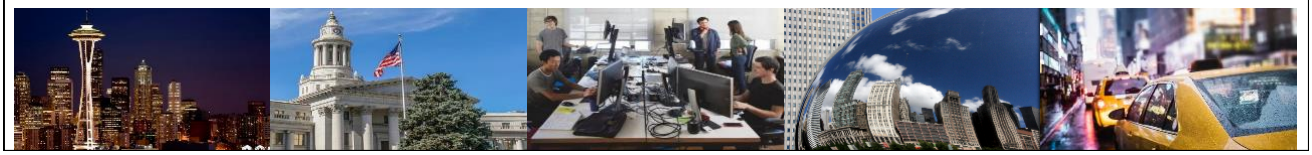
Know What NOT to Say/Do

- Don't guess
  - If they ask a question (policy or fact-based) that you don't know the answer to, say that you or a colleague will follow up (and do so)
- Don't answer questions that are outside your scope, expertise, or are designed to throw others under a bus
  - Practice doing this politely
- Don't talk politics
- Don't get distracted



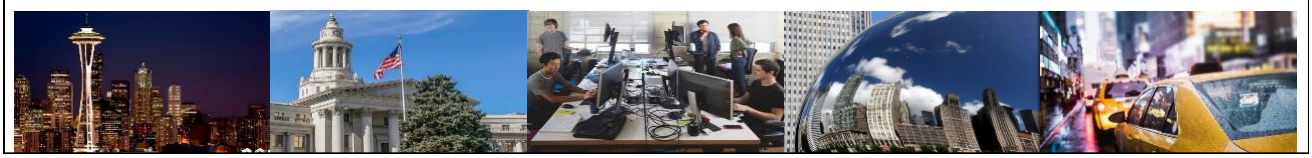
Afterwards

- Thank you email, especially if there were follow-ups (information, introductions, action items)
- Lessons learned
  - Did you get to make your points? Were they heard?
  - What questions were asked? How were your answers? (If the same questions appear over and over, should you incorporate the issue into your messaging/intro?)
- Information sharing -- Did you learn anything that others should know?



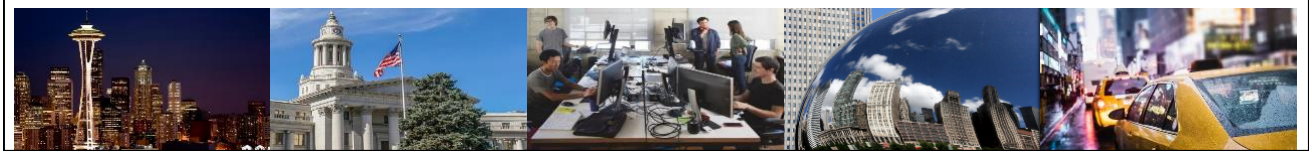
A Special Case: Congressional Testimony (1)

- Same basic rules apply (know your audience and message)
- Some questions extra-important:
  - WHY are they having the hearing (e.g. legislation, oversight, education)
  - WHY you as witness, and WHO else is invited
  - Is CONFLICT expected/desired (among witnesses, with the Committee, between Committee and agencies)



A Special Case: Congressional Testimony (2)

- Testimony:
  - Make recommendations
  - Provide rationales/illustrations/consequences
- Key Differences
  - Public forum (testimony for the record, potential media attention)
  - Time management is critical in statements and answers



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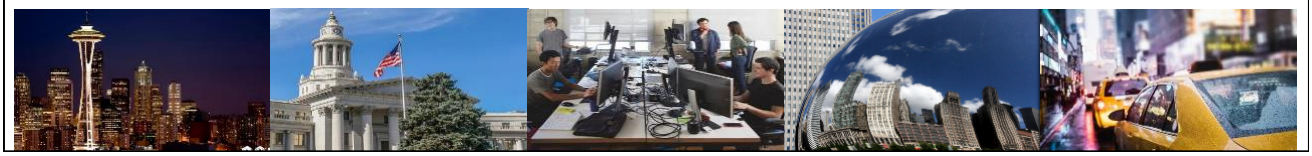


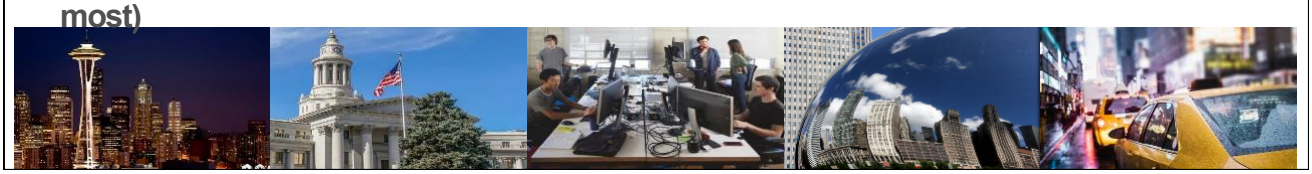
Sample Introduction

We are _____. We represent _____. We are here to tell you about _____ and ask you for _____. We'd like to start by briefly _[see below]_, and then we can answer questions, or go into more depth about this or _____/_____.

Examples

- …telling you about our research to illustrate why these agencies/programs are important
- … describing why we are concerned about proposed policy X, and discussing potential consequences and alternative approaches
- … summarizing how research discoveries get translated into commercial applications and what could help going forward
- … outlining the situation in computing education and how and why it could be improved

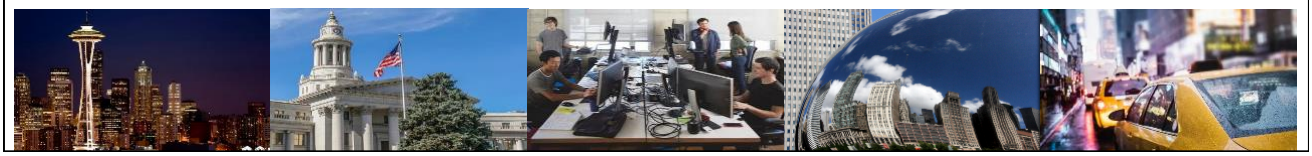
Include an example/scenario and a number, if possible! TIME THIS (3-4 minutes at most)



Examples of Topics of Interest

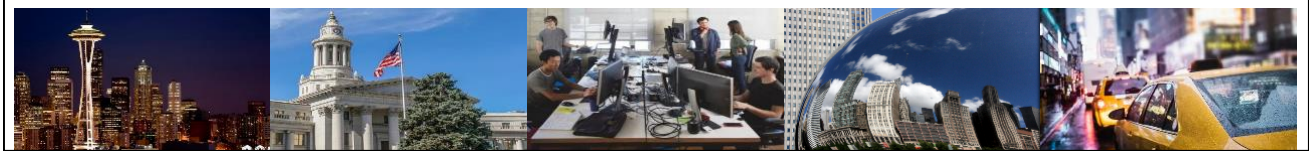
- Jobs, economic impact
- Societal impact
- Local factors ("my" state)
- Education and workforce

- Be able to talk sensitively about:
  - pressures on government funding
  - "basic" research
  - role of universities, government, industry
  - privacy, security
  - foreign students, immigration, workforce
  - women/URM in computer science



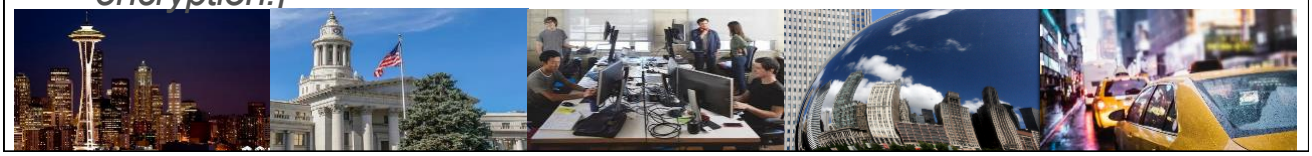
Sample Challenging Questions (1)

- Why should the federal government fund computer science research? (E.g. aren't companies working on security, or robotics, or IT for health and energy?)
- In tight budget times, should NSF move funds from social science or environmental science to areas like computer science?
- What could the government (NSF, DARPA, NIH, NITRD, …) do better (in security, or economic impact, or education)?
- What should the government stop doing?



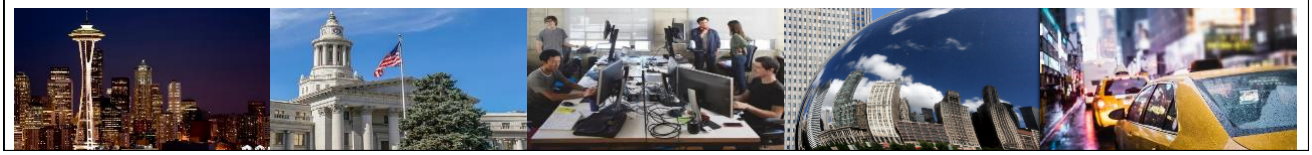
Sample Challenging Questions (2)

- How should research agencies ensure that what the government is funding is important and useful?
- How does peer review work and is it effective?
- Do you work with companies? What makes that work well?
- What role do patents and intellectual property play in your research?
- What do we need to do/spend to make our IT systems secure?
- How can computer science help balance national security and individual rights? *[And related questions about surveillance and encryption.]*



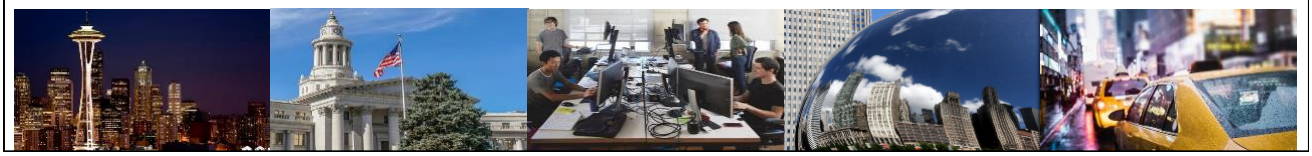
Sample Challenging Questions (3)

- Why are so many of your students foreign? Why don't American students (women, minorities) go into computer science?
- Won't IT (robotics, autonomous vehicles) eliminate jobs?
- Is there a shortage of computer science graduates?
- Are universities teaching the right things to prepare students for today's jobs?
- What is the role of technology in education?



Sample Challenging Questions (4)

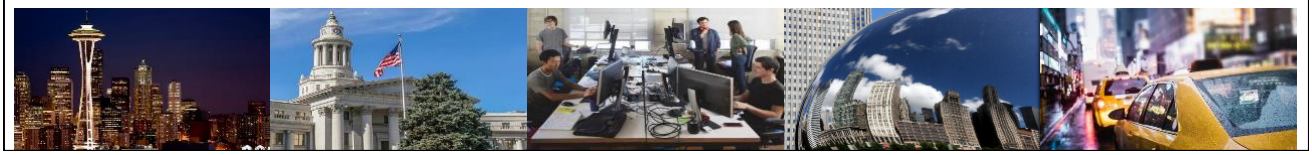
- Is the U.S. falling behind other countries in innovation? What should we do about it?
- How can we get industry to support more research?
- Is innovation still occurring in information technology? *[A possible reference to the R&D tax credit]*
- Did you get any stimulus funding? What difference did it make?
- Why do government employees need to go to conferences?



Practice Practice Practice

- Pick a task (design an intro, respond to certain difficult questions) and an audience
- Discuss/sketch out your spiel/answers
- Practice out loud/time it
- Get feedback/suggestions from colleagues

- When we reconvene tomorrow, people will try out their statements and receive group feedback



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