



Preparing for meetings with the government

The following questions can be asked of the government when you are traveling to Washington, DC to meet with government officials.

Travel

- Can you set up travel logistics such as flights and hotels? Can you pay directly for the travel costs?
- Can you make the hotel reservations?
 - The government occasionally has negotiated rates at pre-set government approved locations. Family members may ask for separate rooms which may or may not be possible.
 - Be sure to ask if the room is pre-paid and get a receipt to present at check-in to avoid having to put down a credit card
- Can you supply a per-diem to cover food and incidentals?
 - This is typically paid on a reimbursement basis so ask the daily amount and keep receipts
 - On occasion, the government will issue a card pre-loaded with money to avoid families having to pay and claim back expenses. This could be sent to their hotel to pick up at check in
- Can you arrange an airport pick-up service? Can it include flight tracking in the event of a delay in arrival?
- Can you set up a pick-up location and provide a contact number in case we do not connect upon arrival?
- Can you arrange a single point of contact for this trip within the government?
 - In the event of a travel problem or emergency, having a single point of contact is important
- Do I need to keep all receipts during the trip? If so, will a photo of the receipt suffice or do you need hard copies?
 - You can take photos of receipts to help keep them organized

Meeting space and timing

- What ID or paperwork is required for entry into the building?
- Can entry into the building be fast tracked through security on a VIP basis or if an escort is needed, can they meet outside of security?
- What materials or items may not be brought to the government building?
- How much advance time is needed to get through security?
 - Plan to arrive 15 minutes before suggested time to have a few minutes before the meeting begins
- Can you provide the full name, job titles, telephone and email contact for each person to be in the room, including staff members who are likely to be attending?
- Can you arrange for name tags or cards to help me keep track of who is who during the meeting?
- If you have special dietary needs and meals will be served, provide them in writing in advance.
- Will there be water or refreshments or do you need to bring water with you?
- If you are meeting at a hotel, the meeting should be in a separate unoccupied room with sitting or living space and should not take place around the bedroom of a hotel room or in an open plan area, such as a restaurant or coffee shop. Be sure to check this before the meeting.

Meeting set-up

- You should be ready to 'take charge' and have an agenda at the ready
 - Hostage US can help to create an agenda and help with the other suggestions in this paper
- Your first question should be how long the meeting will be so you can track progress and prioritize what to ask first without running out of time.
- All government attendees should introduce themselves and provide specific details of their relevance to your family's ordeal and their role in that office or department
- Ask for business cards from everyone in attendance – if someone does not have a card with them, ask them to write down their name, role, email address and phone number
- Make sure the meeting timeframe is clear (the time each government official has to meet with you)
 - It is frustrating to run out of time because the time limit was not known or managed
- Agree that if any family member needs a break, they will signal such and either elect to leave the room or ask government to allow them some privacy by leaving the room

Other considerations

- Get the bios and a picture of each government official who you are meeting
- Request for someone to accompany you to take notes and help you to manage the meeting. Hostage US can arrange to do this if you would like.
- Take note of the name, title and contact details of each participant for follow-up
- Create an agenda of what you want to cover
- Have a written list of questions
- You may want to bring a picture of your loved one to sit on the table with you
- You may want to bring tissues, a snack or water if it is a long meeting
- Bring note pad and pen and agree who is to be the note keeper. Ensure whoever is taking notes will send you a copy at the end of the meeting
- If a you need to get some air or clear your head you should ask for a break, but consider the total timeframe of the meeting
- Before closing the meeting, ask for a summary of what was discussed, agreed, and any timeline. For follow up, be sure to know "who owns" the issue and the expected follow up timing