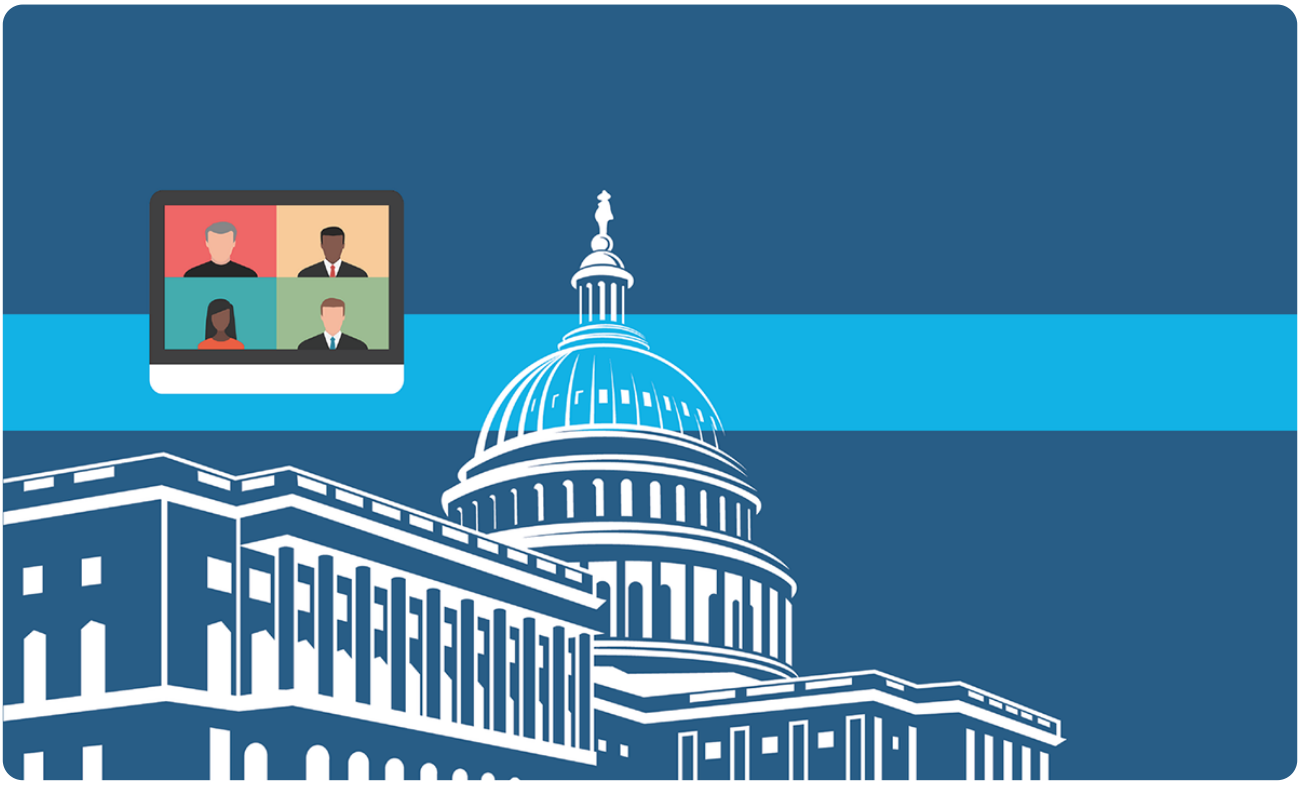
Science Societies

# Virtual advocacy: A new opportunity to engage with policymakers

By Julie McClure

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*lead image*



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2020 has seen changes to almost every aspect of our daily lives, and at least for the time being, virtual interactions have replaced many of the ways we used to engage. I'm sure it will come as no surprise that this applies to advocacy as well. While in-person meetings with constituents are universally agreed to be the most effective form of advocacy, the current climate limits these in-person interactions and has moved advocacy to a virtual setting.

Like most things in this new environment, virtual advocacy has benefits and challenges. While nothing can completely replace meeting face-to-face, in-person advocacy is often limited by distance and time. It takes considerable time and money to travel to congressional offices, whether in Washington, DC or even local offices. Virtual advocacy largely alleviates these issues. Advocates can engage with members of Congress and their staff instantly, right from home. This is a tremendous advantage and opens "in-person" advocacy to a much wider pool of participants.

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA understand the power of in-person, constituent advocacy. Every year, we invite dozens of Society members and Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs) to travel to Washington, DC and meet with congressional offices to advocate for food, agriculture, and natural resources research funding during Congressional Visits Day. However, for 2021, this event is going virtual, which will allow even more Society

members to participate.

Virtual Congressional Visits Day (VCVD) will have many of the same components of in-person CVD: advocacy and communication training, presentations from invited speakers, interactions with a team of fellow advocates, and of course, meetings with members of Congress and their staff. Over the past several months, the Science Policy Office staff have worked to learn virtual advocacy best practices and have partnered with experts in the virtual advocacy space to give our VCVD participants an easy and effective experience.

## Our Goal: One Participant from Each State

Since congressional meetings will take place virtually, we hope to have even more participants than usual. Our goal is at least one participant from all 50 states! This is an exciting opportunity to meet with more congressional offices than ever before and bring greater awareness to agriculture research, fostering new congressional champions.

This year, VCVD will take place on 9–10 March, right in the middle of the annual federal funding process. There's also a good chance Congress will still be finalizing the funding decisions for the previous fiscal year at the same time. We need YOU to help us make sure as many offices as possible hear how important funding for food, agriculture, and natural resources research is! There will also be dozens of new members of Congress who will need input from constituents to help shape their policy priorities.

The application to participate in VCVD is now open. Whether you are a seasoned advocate or brand new to the advocacy world, we need your voice and your experiences to make an impact. Visit **www.agronomy.org/science-policy/get-involved/congressional-visits** more information on VCVD and to apply. The deadline to apply is 8 January.

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