

## Capitol Hill Day

As graduate students and postdoctoral fellows working in the lab, we are acutely aware that [federal funding for basic science has decreased](#) over the years. We may see our PIs struggle to submit one grant after another leaving little time for actual experiments, or colleagues not wanting to pursue a career in academia. Is there anything we can do about this decrease in funding for science? As I found out as a 2015 [SfN Early Career Policy Fellow](#), it turns out we can! The year-long fellowship kicks off with Capitol Hill Day – a unique opportunity for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to interact with policy makers in a supportive environment. This year's Hill Day was on Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, but thanks to the tireless efforts of SfN Advocacy Staff, the preparations start much before the day. Each fellow is paired with two mentors who walk us through what we can expect the day and how to best prepare for Hill Day. On Hill Day, participants visit policy makers in groups – each group consists of 2-3 established investigators who have received federal funding for years and 2-3 young investigators that are just starting out. Each group also has a member who is from SfN or [Research! America](#). As I found out later on, this additional member turned out most useful to get us to where we were supposed to go, as the meetings are spread all over the House and Senate buildings, and you can end up navigating a veritable maze!

- Perhaps the most important thing to remember are the 'asks' – these are concrete steps we requested the policy maker to take. In addition to increasing funding for NIH and NSF, we also asked them to learn more about neuroscience (we offered SfN as a resource) and to visit a lab to learn how funding thus far is being used.
- Depending on your constituency, you are given a list of Congressmen you will meet- make sure you do extensive research beforehand to find out their interests.
- Chances are you'll most likely meet the staffer and not Congressmen in person. Staffers are young, bright (and overworked) individuals who are busy and have many other things on their plates. How we make our message relevant to them is up to us. Be ready with personal stories of how a decreased science funding affects you and your career. As an epilepsy researcher, it was of great interest to me that Congressman Leonard Lance of NJ has a caucus on rare diseases. As seizures can be present in these diseases, this gave me a unique talking point.
- One thing basic scientists should be ready to talk about in this context is the necessity of consistent funding for basic science. To make this point, it is good to know of specific

examples where basic science findings have been useful directly for discovery of novel therapies and techniques.

- We had extensive discussions as a group and had a game plan ready, but I found out that it is just as important to go with the flow and have a relaxed conversation. Of course it's better to learn the stats beforehand, but if asked something you don't have an answer for, tell the policy maker that you will get back to them. This is actually a great opportunity to stay in touch with them!

In ending, I had no idea that meeting elected representatives was so simple and doable – I am certain I will return for 2016 Hill Day!