Even though research generally has bipartisan support, with shrinking budgets and competing agendas, funding for research programs like those at the USDA and the National Science Foundation often get caught in the crosshairs of larger policy debates. So how can scientists hope to break through all of the noise and ensure research funding is a priority for Congress? The short answer? Get involved.

A 2011 survey by the Congressional Management Foundation of more than 250 congressional staff members, showed that in-person constituent visits are the most influential on policy decisions made by a member of Congress (see http://bit.ly/1MNmPMO). When constituents meet face to face with their members of Congress and explain the local effects of their research, it can make a big impact. Now more than ever, scientists must work with policymakers to ensure that federal food, agriculture, and natural resources research has strong and sustained support on the Hill.

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA understand the importance of effective advocacy and science policy and included an emphasis on these topics in their 2016 strategic plans. To that end, the Societies sponsor an exciting opportunity for members to engage in face-to-face advocacy with their members of Congress. For eight years, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA have brought Society members to Washington, DC to participate in our annual advocacy event, Congressional Visits Day.

Congressional Visits Day participants receive training in federal policy and advocacy. Bringing your message to the right people at the right time is critical for effective advocacy. Participants learn where research funding fits into the larger budget picture and which members of Congress hold the most influence over specific research programs.

Participants also receive science communication training. It’s important for Congressional Visits Day participants to understand that the needs of a policy audience are different from those of a scientific audience and to adjust their message accordingly. Focusing on how the end goal of your research will impact local and state communities will be the most persuasive message for a member of Congress. Many participants say that learning how to effectively communicate with policymakers is one of the most valuable skills gained during Congressional Visits Day.

Want to Participate in the Next Congressional Visits Day?
ASA, CSSA, and SSSA sponsor two awards, one for student members and one for non-student members. The Future Leaders in Science Award is open to all graduate student members, and Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs) together with their state food, agriculture, and natural resources research funding.

Society members who participate in Congressional Visits Day receive training in federal policy and advocate for the science community to the right people at the right time for effective advocacy. Participants learn where research funding fits into the larger budget picture and which members of Congress hold the most influence over specific research programs.

Participants also receive science communication training. It’s important for Congressional Visits Day participants to understand that the needs of a policy audience are different from those of a scientific audience and to adjust their message accordingly. Focusing on how their research will impact local and state communities is the most persuasive message for a member of Congress. Many participants say that learning how to effectively communicate with policymakers is one of the most valuable skills gained during Congressional Visits Day.