

# Meeting with your MOCs and other elected officials



## How to set-up, plan and carry out your in-person meeting

### Schedule the meeting

Summer recess is a good time to meet with your Representatives and Senators while they are back home during August. Typically, Congressional office schedules fill quickly, so you should plan ahead.

Each Member of Congress has a website where office contact information can be found. To set up a meeting, call the office closest to you<sup>1</sup> and ask for the contact information for the **scheduler and district staffer covering immigration**. Once you have this information, send an email to both the scheduler and the staffer, that includes:

- **Who you are, what community you are a part of, and what you do:** Keep this part short, but do give them some background and make it known that you are a constituent. If you are requesting a meeting on behalf of your organization, attaching hyperlinks to your email is a useful way to provide more information. If you are requesting a meeting as an individual, make sure to include whether others will join you.
- **Who you want to meet with:** While it can feel more impactful to meet directly with a Member of Congress, meeting with staff is a critical aspect of successful advocacy. If a scheduler says that a member is unavailable, always ask to connect with the staffer handling refugee and asylum issues.
- **What date you would like to meet:** Flexibility is critical! Offer multiple dates and times if possible.
- **What you would like to discuss in the meeting:** This could be as simple as saying you want to discuss refugee resettlement in the district, or the future of foreign aid.

**Remember: Always be polite – and persistent.** Staffers are busy and often receive hundreds of meeting requests. If you don't hear back the first time, be sure to reach out again after a few days. If you requested a member meeting but they are not available, always ask for a meeting with staff instead. A good rule of thumb is to follow up three times.

### Prepare for the meeting

Setting up a meeting is the easy part. Now that you have a date and time to meet with a Congressman or their staff, you will need to think about how you can be most effective. To prepare, you should:

- **Learn about the Member:** Doing your research is **critical** for being an effective advocate. Before a meeting you should research what issues are important to the Congressman and where they stand on refugee resettlement, deportation and foreign aid. Some examples of things you will want to research, are:
- *What committees does the Member sit on?* Depending on the committee assignments of a member, you might want to tailor how you ask them to support refugees. For instance, if a member sits on the Labor, Health and Human Services Committee, you may want to focus on funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Members have greater jurisdiction on the issues that the committee they sit on covers.
- *What issues are of interest to them?* Do they often speak out on a certain issue? This can help you determine what approach to take when discussing refugees in your meeting.
  - *What did they do before they were elected to Congress?* What a Congressman did before being elected can and does impact their perspective. It is your job as a successful advocate to discuss topics and frame issues in a way that will resonate with them. For

instance, a member that used to be a businessman may respond most positively to information about the economic contributions of refugees to the U.S.

- *What have they said about refugees, asylum seekers, humanitarian parolees, the border, deportation, foreign aid?* Has the Member put out statements, authored op-eds, or done other advocacy to support any of these areas? If they have taken positive action, be sure to thank their staff for their work. If they have a record for not supporting refugee resettlement or the right to apply for asylum, find out why. Have they cited reasons for these positions? If so, build your talking points to address their concerns in a respectful manner.
- **Gather your team:** When choosing who will attend advocacy meetings, consider your research. Based on what you have learned about the Member, ask yourself who in your community can be the most influential. This could include religious leaders, business owners, or community leaders who can speak about, for example, the benefits of a robust refugee resettlement program, or the impact of increased immigration detention on your community.
- **Have a plan:** Before you attend the meeting, prepare with your team what topics you want to discuss and think about any facts and figures you want to share, or handouts or other resources you want to bring. Remember that the most important thing you can do is discuss what your personal experiences have been, and what refugees and immigrants bring to your community. Go into the meeting with at least one, but not more than three, clear and specific asks for the staffer. These asks may range from supporting a specific piece of legislation to attending a roundtable on refugee resettlement. HIAS regularly updates our talking points, and you can find them [here](#).
- **Don't forget the power of a story:** Many of the communities and leaders taking part in this advocacy have already acted in some form on this issue. If your clergy has been to the southern border, if your community resettled a refugee or an Afghan arrival here on humanitarian parole, you have powerful stories to share. Those stories are powerful and important to share.

## Meeting agenda outline

- **Introductions:** Everyone in attendance should introduce themselves. Make sure to ask for the names and titles of all staff for the Member who are in the meeting.
- **Synagogue/Community/Coalition introduction:** If you are meeting as part of a synagogue, grassroots coalition or community group, describe that as well, including name, religious affiliation, size, and history. The goal here is to give the office a sense of your group, why it is important and what kind of power and standing it may have in their district.
- **This is a Jewish Issue:** Concern for refugees and asylum seekers- for people in search of safety and opportunity is central to Jewish tradition from the origins of our people's story with the sojourning of Sarah and Abraham to the exodus from Egypt. Jewish tradition takes a commitment to care for the *ger* – the stranger – so seriously – it is commanded thirty-six times in the Torah—more than any other commandment. The experience of the refugee is so thoroughly woven into our Jewish self-understanding, our history and our ritual that to overlook it is to fundamentally miss the core emphasis of the tradition. Because of this centrality, HIAS has support from more than 2000 clergy across denominations and more than 950 congregations in the United States – people and communities who advocate, donate and volunteer, who support and resettle those who have been forcibly displaced in their communities.
- **Powerful story:** about why this is important to you and your team: While our stats and specific policy asks are important, emotion is what moves people to action. Have you resettled a refugee or humanitarian parolee from Afghanistan or Ukraine? Have members of your community gone to the border? Have you raised funds or supplies or volunteered with a local resettlement agency? Does someone in your group have a specific story about that work? If not, do you have a specific story about why this matters to you?

- **Policy Asks:** Request that the Representative/Senator cosponsor, support, and push for Congress to .... pass/block legislation. Again, please refer to our regularly updated [talking points](#) for the most current asks.
- **Time for the Representative/Senator/Staff to respond:** Give the legislator or their staff some time to respond to your asks. Be respectful and listen carefully to things that are not a clear commitment. If you don't get a clear answer, please feel free to politely ask again.
- **Request for follow-up:** Whether the legislator or staff need more time to give you a direct answer, or they are telling you they are going to act, please ask the staff to follow up via email with the group to update you.
- **Thanks and invitation:** Thank the legislator/their staff for their time. Let them know that you are interested in ongoing communication on this issue. At this point, you can invite them to be a part of an event or meeting at your congregation or invite them to be a part of an event in your community in the future.

## Follow up after the meeting

Anytime you meet with a Congressman or their staff, it is essential to send a proper note following the meeting. Be sure to:

- **Say thank-you:** Always thank a staffer for their time. If you meet directly with a Congressman, be sure to thank the scheduler who assisted you as well as any staff who attended the meeting. This can go a long way when conducting future correspondence.
- **Reiterate the asks:** Be sure to reiterate the asks from the meeting, and if possible, remind the staffer what they said they would like to do, or committed to doing in person.
- **Send additional information:** If you told a staffer that you would send along documents or information, now is the perfect time to do this. You can also strengthen your asks by sending along any supplementary information (one-pagers, news articles, etc.) that will provide the staffer the information they need to follow through.
- **Fill out this short feedback form** to let us know how the meeting went. The more information we have about these conversations, the more effective we can be in our advocacy.

## Maintain the relationship

The work of an advocate doesn't end with follow-up. **Successful advocates maintain relationships with Congressmembers and their staff.** Keeping the lines of communication open can help you in the future. The best way to continue building relationships with staffers is to engage with them. You can do this by:

- Inviting them to relevant community events;
- Touching base regarding policy or legislative changes;
- Thanking a member via email or social media when they put out positive statements, sign letters, speak out during a hearing, or otherwise do something supportive for the issues on which you advocated to them.

## Additional Resources

- [This toolkit from Refugee Council USA \(RCUSA\)](#) provides additional step-by-step instructions on how to set up a meeting with your Members of Congress.
- Find additional tips in this [advocacy training slide deck](#) created for Community Sponsors.