How to: Advocacy Meetings

Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

SCHEDULE THE MEETING

A good time to meet with Members of Congress and their staff is during Congressional recesses when they are working in their district offices. Schedules fill up quickly during these times, so you should plan ahead. Congressional calendars and in-district days can be found online.

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[1] 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, where you work, 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 be connected with the staffer handling refugee and asylum issues.

- **What date you would like to meet:** You want to be flexible and 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 the refugee resettlement program.

Remember: Always be polite, but be 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 time and date to meet with a member 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 a member and where they stand on refugees. Some examples of things you will want to research, are:
  - *What committees the member sits 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

[1] Senators have many offices in their district because it is so large, while representatives usually only have one local office.

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 member did before they were an elected official 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, Afghans and Ukrainians?* Has the member put out statements, authored op-eds, or done other advocacy to support the refugee resettlement program? On Title 42 or the Afghan Adjustment Act? 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 to the benefits of a robust refugee resettlement program in 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 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.

- [ ] **Don't forget the power of story:** Many of the communities and leaders taking part in this advocacy have already taken action 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.

FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE MEETING

Anytime you meet with a member or their staff you should send a proper follow-up. When you write your follow-up, be sure to:

- ☐ **Say thank-you:** Always thank a staffer for their time. If you meet directly with a member, be sure to thank the scheduler who assisted you as well as the staffer 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 yours asks by sending along any supplementary information (one-pagers, news articles, etc.) that will provide the staffer the information they need to follow through.

MAINTAIN THE RELATIONSHIP

The work of an advocate doesn't end with the follow-up email. **Successful advocates maintain relationships with members 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 them. You can do this, by:

- ☐ Inviting them to refugee related 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 help support the refugee program.