



BUILDING A BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Building a Relationship with Your Member of Congress

It's not just DC insiders who can have the ear of Members of Congress. With some planning, you and your Indivisible group can also develop working relationships with your elected officials. If you keep at it, your MoC will start to see you as a key constituent group to consider when they are evaluating legislation or trying to get a bill passed.

Building a relationship with your Members of Congress (MoC) and their staff is an essential strategy for building grassroots power. The most effective way is to schedule regular, face-to-face meetings with your MoC and/or their staff. These meetings serve the purpose of letting them know who you are, what you care about, and what you expect from them as your elected representatives. While scheduling an in-person meeting with your MoC isn't always possible, there are other ideas in this resource to help you.

Why is building a relationship important? Once the relationship is established it opens the door for asking your MoC to take bigger actions like making public statements, lobbying their colleagues in Congress, signing onto a Dear Colleague letter, or attending your local

Indivisible event. If you want to influence your MoC's actions in Congress, they need to take you seriously as a powerful political force that can make their jobs easier, or harder.

Here are some ways to build that relationship:

- Scheduled meetings
- Drop-in office visits
- Move your MoC through steps on the [MoC Ladder of Engagement](#) to be more engaged
 - Invite your MoC to Indivisible events
 - Encourage your MoC to make a public statement
 - Encourage your MoC to hold a Town Hall meeting

1. Getting Started: What to Know About Your MoC's Offices and Staff

Going in person to your MoC's office for a scheduled meeting or drop in visit is an extremely effective way to establish your Indivisible group as a valuable ally (or fierce opponent) and a compelling voice for your community. It also demonstrates to your MoC that you, their constituents, care very much about the issues you bring to the table and that you'll be paying attention to what they do going forward.

Each member of Congress has a main office in Washington DC and one or more local/district offices, with a team of [professional staff](#) to assist them during a term in office.

Your MoC's DC office staff typically includes a Chief of Staff, Legislative Director, Communication Director, Legislative Correspondent, Scheduler, Legislative Assistants plus others who cover legislative issues in different policy areas. Each office is different, and they may have other staff like Press Assistants, Policy Advisors, or Directors of Operations as well.

Constituents often don't know they can visit their MoC's local offices and very rarely do, so it's a great way to get their attention. You'll find your MoC's district office locations and phone numbers listed on their government website, which you can find by searching the members directory on the official Congress.gov website:

<https://www.congress.gov/members>

District office staffing includes a State or District Director, who manages the staff and operations of your MoC's district offices, and one or more caseworkers who work directly with constituents to solve problems with federal benefit programs and keeps a log of questions and comments for the member. They may also have outreach staff with titles like Field Representative or Regional Director whose jobs are to be in touch with constituents

and members of the community, frequently representing the MoC at community meetings or events.

Typically, district staff are not policy experts or deeply-versed in legislative issues. However, they will frequently take legislative meetings on behalf of the member of Congress when he or she is unable to meet with constituents in the district. They will either include the legislative staff in Washington via conference call, or pass on the information to the appropriate Legislative Assistant for follow up.

2. How to Find Out Where Your MoC Stands on the Issues

To use your time in the most impactful way during your meeting or district office visit, do some basic research before you meet with your member of Congress or their staff. At a minimum, find out where your MoC stands on the policy positions you want them to take action on.

Your MoC's congressional website is a great place to start digging and often includes descriptions of their policy priorities, recent public statements and press releases, and other public info like videos and transcripts of floor statements. You can also find information about your MoC's committee assignments and voting record by searching the [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) website. Your MoC may also be a member of a congressional caucus or coalition, which is a good thing to know – congressional caucuses often have their own websites that list the names of members. It can also be a good idea to look at their official social media pages, which are a good window into what issues they most frequently talk about or focus on. Reviewing this background info before your meeting can help you prepare questions that get right to the point of how you want your MoC to respond to the issues you care about.

3. How to Have a Successful District Office Visit

Whether you are having a scheduled meeting with your MoC, zooming with a staff member, or organizing a drop-in visit at the nearest district office, you'll need to plan ahead.

TIPS FOR PLANNING A SCHEDULED MEETING WITH YOUR MoC

Decide whether your meeting will be a constituent meeting or a lobby meeting. A typical **constituent meeting** is a scheduled MoC office visit with a few individuals from one grassroots group or advocacy organization, and might include a discussion of several broad areas of policy solutions that are important to your local group. **Lobby meetings** usually include leaders and representatives from several different grassroots groups and advocacy organizations from your MoC's district, and focus more narrowly on specific actions you want your MoC to take to support or oppose legislation that is moving toward a vote. While planning and recruiting participation for a scheduled constituent meeting is relatively uncomplicated and possible to do on

short notice, sponsoring a lobby meeting requires more time for preparation to confirm a date with your MoC's scheduler and coordinate the meeting agenda and question topics with other stakeholders who will want to have a say. This section is primarily a guide for planning a scheduled constituent meeting at your MoC's district office (or on zoom).

- Schedule the meeting.** When you're ready to meet with your member of Congress, you will need to contact their DC office and ask to speak with the Scheduler. Typically the best way to start is to submit an official meeting request via your MoC's government website, though you can follow up by calling the office if you don't get a response in a timely manner. It normally takes a long time to get a date and time for a constituent meeting, so be prepared to be persistent. You are also more likely to get on your MoC's schedule if you can be flexible about meeting dates and times. Don't be discouraged if you are offered a meeting with staff. If you're planning to schedule a regular meeting once a month or once every other month, you will typically be meeting with staff in one of your MoC's district offices.
- Ask to meet with the member.** It's unlikely that your MoC will be in their district office, but you should always ask for a meeting with them especially during Congressional recess especially during Congressional recesses. If they're unavailable, ask for a meeting with the District Director (the highest level staff member in the office). As you strengthen your relationship with the office, it's more likely you'll get to meet with the MoC themselves, even if it's only once or twice a year.
- Plan your meeting.** Prepare talking points and questions in advance so that your group can use your meeting time to get your most important points across. Make sure to include one or two specific asks of your MoC. If you're meeting with the MoC themselves, meeting times are typically pretty short, between 15-20 minutes. So it's important to plan ahead and be efficient!
- Recruit and confirm participants.** Once you have a meeting date, recruit and confirm attendance. Make sure everyone is in the loop about the purpose of your meeting and what you want to come away with. If you are having a scheduled, in-person meeting, there may be a limit on the number of people who can attend. The office will likely ask for a list of participants in advance.
- Choose a spokesperson.** Designate one person from your group to do most of the talking. Reconfirm with the MoC or staffer the exact time frame of the meeting. It's perfectly fine to have multiple people speak. But to make sure that the meeting goes smoothly for your group, it's helpful to have a lead speaker and then others who have a specific talking point or issue that they will raise during the course of the meeting. Agree on a time limit for how long each person can speak during the meeting before it's time to move on to the next question.

- Establish your legitimacy.** Introduce yourselves and identify as constituents. Talk about where in the district you live, some offices may ask for specific zip codes. Prepare and leave behind a fact sheet with information about your group and some of the local actions you've taken with links to earned media.
- Tell them why you're there.** You have the most leverage when you're talking to them about an issue that's currently moving across their desks. Congressional staff regularly take meetings with folks who want to talk about stuff that's happening in a month or next year. But a typical staffer isn't thinking far beyond what's crossing the MoC's desk today.
- Focus on one issue at a time.** Don't try to cover too many topics in one visit. Choose one or two of the most important and timely issues that matter to your group, and talk about why it's important to you and what you want your MoC to do to support your position.
- Tell them your personal stories.** Stories can be a powerful way to reinforce a point. Be honest. Be vulnerable. Your story matters, and you deserve the chance to share it. But if you are planning to share a personal story during the meeting, take some time to plan what you want to say in advance. Practice, and ask others for feedback on how to tell your story in the most clear and compelling way. Be sensitive to using your meeting time efficiently (in other words, keep it short!).
- Don't settle for non-answers.** If congressional staff are dodging your question—saying they have to check back and then respond to you—be polite but firm while demanding an answer or a due date for follow up.
- Close the meeting by letting them know that you want to meet again.** Your MoC works for you. Let them or their District Director know that you'll be back as often as it takes to make sure that your voice is heard. Get the contact information of everyone you meet with and send a follow-up email when you get home.
- Record it or it didn't happen.** Get a picture of your group at the office or, better yet, get a video of members of your group talking about the reason you're meeting with your MoC before and after your visit, and post it on social media and tag your representative - they may even reshare it! Be sure to ask permission from the office before taking photos or video during the meeting, as offices typically have an approval process for that.

After the Meeting:

- Follow up and plan your next meeting.** Send a thank you note or email to the staff or MoC you met with. Use it as an opportunity to restate and amplify your asks. Propose a regular meeting with the MoC's staff and your group to stay in touch on

progress on your priorities. These could be monthly, quarterly, or a different interval that works for your group and the office.

- Thank everyone in your group who participated and debrief the conversation.** Reiterate that conversations with MoCs and staff are the best way to ensure your elected officials speak up for their constituents. Ask for their feedback on the meeting. Align on next steps or topics to follow up on in your next meeting with the office. Be sure to invite them to your next group meeting or event.
- Invite your member of congress to your events.** Once you've held a successful meeting, find opportunities to reach out to your MoCs and invite them to speak at your meetings/events. This is a great way to build a relationship with your member and their staff and ensure that your opinions are heard. If your events garner local press, be sure to note that in the invitation you send to your MoC!
- Send Letters to the Editor of your local newspaper.** Ask group members who attended the meeting to write and submit LTEs about why they attended the meeting, what they learned, and why the issues discussed are personally important to them. You can also use your LTEs to reinforce your asks to your MoC.

TIPS FOR PLANNING A DISTRICT OFFICE DROP-IN VISIT

Drop-in visits to your MoC's district offices are an excellent way to get a single point across, and can be easy to organize and really fun when they have a theme (for example, everyone wearing a t-shirt with your slogan) or include props like people wearing costumes or giant posters or thank-you cards that you can leave behind. In most cases, your drop-in group can just show up during the hours your MoC's district office is open to visitors

Before You Go:

- Make a plan with your group.** During a regular meeting or special planning meeting, review the below steps with your group and assign responsibilities.
- Find the right office.** Every MoC lists the physical addresses of their district offices on their public website. You may have to poke around a bit, but it's there. If you can't find it, just give them a call and ask—the staff will be happy to tell you locations and hours.
- Pick a day to go.** Pick a day and time between 9-5 when as many of the members of your group can participate as possible—for example, at the beginning of the day or during lunch hour.

- Recruit and confirm participants.** Once you've determined the time for your drop-in action, recruit and confirm attendance. Make sure everyone is in the loop about the purpose of your meeting and what you want to come away with.
- Don't let “by appointment only” cramp your style.** If your congressional office is listed as being open “by appointment only,” you can either call ahead to make one, or you can try just showing up. If you decide to just show up, be ready if the office is closed—plan a creative action your group can take a video of, or take a picture of the closed office and post it to social media.
- Decide your “ask” and make it relevant.** Congressional staff regularly take meetings with folks who want to talk about stuff that's happening next month or next year. But to make your visit count, focus on what Congress is working on now. This changes constantly, but keep an eye out for our regular email updates with suggestions on some issues to focus on.
- Decide who you want to speak with and who from your group will talk.** Your MoC likely won't be in the local office, although you never know. The best person on his or her staff to meet with is the District/Office Director. They may try to get rid of you—don't take “no” for an answer. If you show up in a group, they will be more likely to see you. If no one on staff is available to meet with your group, sign in and have statements ready to leave with the staff at the front desk.
- Assign speaking roles within your group so that individuals are prepared to cover the points they want to cover ahead of time.** If you're focusing on an issue that personally affects members of your group, then prioritize having them speak (if they are comfortable sharing their stories).
- If no one in the office is available to meet with you, have a prepared leave-behind document** that outlines the purpose of your desire to meet and the specific actions that you'd like MoC to take.

At The Office:

- Establish your legitimacy.** Introduce yourselves and your group. Identify yourselves as constituents and talk about where in the district or state you live.
- Say what you stand for.** For example, you could share the purpose statement of your local group and why you are there.
- Stand Indivisible...literally.** Many offices have been trying to break up large groups by bringing three or four people inside at a time. They're trying to divide and conquer—the office thinks this will soften the impact of your visit. Don't let them get away with it! If congressional staffers try this, demand that they bring everyone inside or have them send the MoC/staff outside to meet with you there.

- Focus on one issue.** Choose one timely issue that matters to your group, and talk about why it's important to you and what you want your MoC to do to support your position.
- Tell your stories.** If this issue would affect you, your family, or your friends and neighbors, talk about how and why.
- Don't settle for non-answers.** If congressional staff are dodging your question—if they say they have to check back and respond to you—be polite but firm. Ask for a date when you will receive follow up.
- Close the meeting by planting your flag in the office.** Not literally! But your MoC works for you. Say you will be coming back regularly to make sure the MoC is listening to you and representing his or her constituents. Get the contact information of everybody you talk to, and send a follow up email after.
- Record it or it didn't happen.** Get a picture of your group at the office. Even better yet, get a video of your group before, during, and/or after. Bottom line, your voice will be louder and better heard if you document your action.

After Your Visit:

- Post photos and videos on social media.** Send your pictures to stories@indivisibleguide.com as well.
- Send a thank you letter.** Particularly if you have a meeting with your MoC, send a thank you letter, reiterating briefly the main ask you discussed and thanking everyone for their time.
- Debrief with your group.** Discuss what went well and what you can do better next time.
- Plan your next action!** Figure out how you'll keep up the momentum moving forward.

TIPS FOR REGULAR DISTRICT OFFICE VISIBILITIES AND VISITS:

Regular visits can have a huge impact. If your group has the capacity to send people once a week, your group's presence will be felt in a big way, whether you're welcomed in every time, stuck outside holding signs, or something in between.

Here are some tips from groups that have been making weekly visits:

- **Be persistent!** Multiple groups have gone from protesting in a parking lot to being invited inside to have meetings with staff.

- **Have people take shifts.** It doesn't need to be the same people every time.
- **To avoid burnout, set start and end times for your visit** to make it clear that no one is expected to linger all afternoon. (e.g. 12:00-12:30)
- **Be friendly with the security and building management. It may pay off in the future.** In one district, when a congressional office complained to a newspaper about its Indivisible visitors, the office's building management told the paper the group was consistently polite and friendly. In another district, security personnel had our group's back when their visits attracted conservative counter-protesters.
- **Be appreciative of staff.** Be courteous and say thank you when they're helpful.
- **Be polite to staff even if they are rude.** If a staffer is initially frosty, they may well warm up when they realize your group is friendly and civil. They may have been told to beware of rude, aggressive protesters: prove them wrong. If a staffer is being repeatedly hostile, remember that they may be looking for an excuse not to engage with your group: don't take the bait.

TROUBLESHOOTING:

PROBLEM: The staff have scheduled a meeting with us, but they've said that only 3 or 4 members of a group are allowed to attend a meeting in person, though the office could clearly accommodate a dozen of us in their conference room.

SUGGESTION: If the office is clearly enforcing an arbitrary cap on your group, point that out in person and online. District offices take meetings with big groups of visitors throughout the year. Ask the staff if they could clarify whether that cap applies to all visitors, and if not, why your group is being treated differently. Especially during warmer months, volunteer that you're happy to meet outside if space or occupancy is a concern.

PROBLEM: We can't record video or take photos during our visits because the staff all insist they don't want to be photographed, or because the office is in a federal building that restricts cameras.

SUGGESTION: There is a lot of content your group can create before and after a visit that has a big impact. Here are some that have garnered media attention on their own:

- Take a cell phone video outside right after your visit summarizing what happened.
- Take group pictures outside by doors and signs.
- If you're delivering any items or letters, take photos in advance.

PROBLEM: Our congressional office keeps asking us to submit a formal meeting request, but they never get back. They are clearly giving us the bureaucratic runaround.

SUGGESTION: Keep submitting those meeting requests as you're asked to, and keep a record of them. Do it regularly but not too frequently, like once a week. You don't need to put much thought into the content of your messages. The point is just to develop a record. In the future, your group might appear at another public event and your MoC's office tells the press that your group didn't go through the proper channels to see them. If that happens, you'll be able to say: "We've been submitting a request once a week for the past three months, exactly as requested."

PROBLEM: Our group has gone to our MoC's office seeking a meeting, but we've been shut out multiple times and we're getting fed up.

SUGGESTION: Persistence pays off! Some groups have had staff start to invite them in to speak after several weeks of not being allowed past the lobby. They've then had good meetings. Keep track, take photos each visit.

PROBLEM: Our group has set up regular meetings with our MoC's office, but the staffer we're meeting with seems very junior and isn't able to provide definitive answers on any of our questions. Even when we agree on a date they will respond to us with an answer, they're often vague or unhelpful in their response.

SUGGESTION: If you're consistently unable to get definitive answers from the staffer you've met with, ask politely if there's someone else on their team who can join your next meeting who might be able to speak in more detail. You're asking them to take you seriously, so be sure to continue to prove your legitimacy. Be persistent if they try to brush you off. You can also ask for specific questions about their office's process for passing information along to the Member of Congress. For example, if you've asked them to sign on to a letter or cosponsor a bill, ask the staff how that recommendation is relayed to the representative and what the typical timeline is for a response.

Planning a In Person or Virtual Town Hall

While there are some key differences between planning an in-person event and a virtual event, don't forget you still need to put plenty of time into planning. You may not need to deal with some of the logistics like booking a venue or arranging chairs, but there are some important additional steps when planning a virtual event. Consult our [Town Hall planning resources](#).

Consider inviting your MoC to be a guest speaker at an in-person event like your monthly meeting or a rally. Reach out to them as soon as possible as their schedules fill up quickly. Confirm ahead of time their time commitment so that if there is time, a Q&A section can be built into the agenda or one or two group members can share about why a particular topic is important to Indivisible.

Moving your MoC to become more engaged

There are many benefits to building a stronger relationship with your member of Congress:

- You want your MoC to view your local Indivisible group as a trustworthy voice in your community, and an important ally (or formidable opponent);
- You want your MoC to respect, and potentially seek out, your advocacy positions on key legislative issues;
- You want your MoC to attend events and meetings where they can interact with your members and attract earned media coverage;
- You want your MoC to share updates about their priorities and insider perspectives on what's happening in congress;
- You want to influence your MoC to take a clear public stand on sponsoring a bill, casting a vote, or endorsing a policy position.

In return, your MoC benefits when your grassroots group consistently shows up to give public accolades and support when they take the right action, and vocally criticize the positions of their detractors. If your MoC is often on the wrong side of legislative issues, your efforts to establish a relationship will make your public criticism more powerful.

One way to think about the power of building a relationship with your member of Congress is the opportunity to move your MoC up the [ladder of engagement](#) by encouraging them to take stronger stands on issues that reflect Indivisible's core democratic values. While we often focus our advocacy goals on asking our MoCs to support a specific piece of legislation, there are many other ways your MoC can demonstrate leadership and amplify mainstream (anti-MAGA) values, including signing on or co-sponsoring a "dear colleague" letter, making public statements, and influencing other MoCs to take a public stand.

MoC LADDER OF ENGAGEMENT

Where is your MoC on the Ladder of Engagement?

It's great to vote for good bills but MoCs all have the opportunity to do more and be leaders on our issues. We want them to use their positions and their platforms to champion our issues - and part of that is engaging with local Indivisible groups. Use this resource as a guide to determine where your MoC is on the ladder and how you can move them up.

LEVEL 4

- Helps move other MoCs
- Initiates hearings & letters of support
- Makes frequent public statements on social media / press
- Introduces strong legislation that sends a clear message
- Frequently appears at public events with Indivisibles

LEVEL 3

- Frequently cosponsors important bills on our issues
- Makes public statements on our issues
- Meets with Indivisible groups on a regular basis
- Occasionally appears at public events with Indivisibles
- Introduces bills on our issues, but falls for bad deals with Republicans

LEVEL 2

- Makes occasional floor statements or posts on social media
- Meets with Indivisible groups after many asks
- Will co-sponsor legislation after significant pressure

LEVEL 1

- Hesitant to schedule meetings with your group
- Will sign on to a letter of support with significant pressure
- Rarely makes public statements about our issues

GROUND LEVEL

- Opposed or neutral on our issues
- Has never met with your Indivisible group
- Won't make public statements about our issues
- Distances themselves from grassroots activists

