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CARE® ACTION

HOW TO HOLD SUCCESSFUL IN-DISTRICT MEETINGS

The most powerful way to influence Members of Congress (MOCs) is by meeting with them or their staff members, face-to-face. These meetings now happen via video conference, but advocates have discovered they can be just as effective as meeting in person. In fact, a survey of Congressional staff members reveals that nearly two-thirds of Congressional offices are having more numerous and substantive interactions with constituents since the start of COVID-19.[1]

Some of the most important meetings occur when the Member is in his or her home-district or state. **Being home allows Members to meet with constituents more easily and learn what issues are important to them.** These are called "**in-district meetings**" and make up the core of CARE's advocacy model. They provide opportunities for CARE advocates to:

- Build and grow relationships with their representatives
- Keep Members informed about CARE's advocacy agenda
- Impress upon Members that they have vocal, active constituents who care about international issues

1 Source: Congressional Management Foundation, The Future of Citizen Engagement: FUNDED BY A GRANT FROM DEMOCRACY FUND Coronavirus, Congress, and Constituent Communications, Kathy Goldschmidt and Bradley Joseph Sinkaus

Which Is Better: Meeting with Members of Congress or Staff?

The short answer is, they're both great! It's critical to build relationships with both Members and their staff.

Meeting with a Member of Congress:

Some in-district meetings occur with the Member. These meetings are extremely valuable for advancing CARE's agenda. When an MOC meets with a CARE advocate, they can put a constituent's face on CARE's mission to eradicate poverty. Members are usually impressed that advocates in their district make time to discuss foreign assistance and they're often eager to hear what's happening on the ground in countries where CARE works. These meetings provide powerful opportunities to influence MOCs and support CARE's mission.

Meeting with Congressional staff:

Most in-district meetings occur with staff members from the Member's office. All legislators rely heavily on staffers, who control the flow of information. That's why meetings with staffers are so important. While most in-district staff members work on domestic (local and national) issues, they are willing to speak with constituents on a variety of issues and relay messages to foreign policy staffers in Washington, D.C. These meetings also help advocates gain access to the legislator at a future date.

Step by Step: Scheduling and Preparing for In-District Meetings

The key to making in-district meetings effective is to be **prepared**, **focused**, **informative** and **friendly**. These tips will help you prep for your in-district meetings.

> **"It is an amazing feeling to sit at a table with someone that you know has the ability to make a decision and understand you're a part of that decision."**
>
> **— Jennifer Wells, CARE advocate, West Virginia**

1. Reach out to your Regional Advocacy Manager

CARE Action's team of Regional Advocacy Managers (RAM) are spread across the U.S. to be your connection to CARE's legislative agenda and global work on-the-ground. Ahead of your meeting, they can:

- Let you know when congressional recess dates are so you can schedule a meeting when your Member is in the district
- Provide all the background information and talking points you'll need during your meeting.
- Help you connect with other CARE advocates in your district who can attend your meeting with you. Your RAM might join the meeting, too!

Not sure who your RAM is? View our map and contact information [here](#).

2. Schedule an in-district meeting

- Visit your Member's website and get the **contact information (email and phone number) for their appointment scheduler**. If you cannot find this information, reach out to your RAM.
- Send an email that's addressed to your Member but directed to the attention of their scheduler. (Find a pre-written template below!)
- Use a subject line like, *'Scheduling a meeting with [Member Name] and CARE'*
- In the body of the email:
    - Request a meeting time and date at least a week in advance of the day you want to meet
    - Tell the scheduler what topics you want to discuss
    - List who will attend the meeting with you, like fellow advocates or a RAM
    - Mention any specific date or dates you'd like to schedule
    - **Pro tip:** Try to schedule your meeting on a Monday or Friday when your member of Congress may not be in Washington, D.C.

> **"I was very nervous to meet my Congressman before that first advocacy meeting. Four years later, I realize how empowering that moment was."**
>
> **— Tina Hanson, CARE advocate, California**

Email Template:

Hello ____________ (Staffer Name),

Hope you're well! My name is_____________ and I'm a constituent of Senator/Congressperson ___________. I'm also an advocate for CARE, a leading humanitarian organization that works to defeat global poverty.

A group of CARE advocates and myself would like to request a meeting with Senator/Congressperson ___________ to discuss ______________ (name of bill or issue).

Would the Senator/Congressperson have any availability to meet with us the week of __________ on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday afternoon? I've provided a list of constituents below who also plan to join this meeting.

Please let me know if you need any additional information. I look forward to hearing from you.

Your Name
Your Phone Number
Your Email

3. Follow-up and be persistent

Don't be surprised if you don't hear back from the scheduler immediately and need to follow-up via email or phone. They're busy people, but this is their job, so be persistent and patient. You may have to target a few dates before you find one that works. Let your RAM know, once you've set the date.

4. Form your delegation

A team of advocates is called a "delegation." **There's power in numbers and having more than one advocate (but fewer than five) in your delegation makes in-district meetings more memorable and influential.** Contact friends, other CARE supporters or community members in your area and ask them to join your meeting or ask your RAM to connect you with other advocates. In-district meetings are great opportunities to bring new advocates to the table. So, invite a friend! Reassure them that they don't have to speak up if they don't feel ready and that **their presence alone speaks volumes**.


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5. Schedule a pre-meeting

Schedule a time with your RAM and your delegation to go over talking points and determine each person's role in the meeting. While you don't have to be an expert, you do want to be as well-prepared as you can be for your in-district meeting. **Study talking points and background information provided by your RAM** and take notes to refer to in your meeting.

Lastly, decide where you'll meet on your meeting day (if meeting in-person) and **make sure each advocate has all the information they need,** including contact information for each member of the delegation, the district office, and dial-in instructions if meeting virtually.

6. Plan your meeting

Make sure each delegate has a role to play in the meeting. Commonly, one person introduces CARE, others handle legislative topics, another makes the ask and offer and says thanks. Break it up however is most appropriate for your delegation. **An in-district meeting will be approximately 30 minutes (or less) and will follow a simple agenda:**

- **Introduce yourselves:** Each delegate introduces themselves and, in a sentence or two, explains why they advocate for CARE. One delegate introduces CARE's history, work and mission.
- **Make it a conversation:** Take a moment to ask staff questions about their work, travel experiences, or specific areas of focus. Ask the Member if they've travelled internationally or if they hear about global issues often. Their answers will help inform how familiar they are with U.S. global leadership and may guide the basis of your relationship.
- **Make your point:** The main purpose of your meeting will be to discuss CARE's legislative priorities. Your RAM can provide specific talking points and the legislative agenda you'll discuss. Most meetings cover 1-3 specific legislative "asks."

WATCH: Not sure how to talk about CARE and its mission? Show this video in your meeting or use it to familiarize yourself with CARE!

- **Make the ask**: Close your meeting by asking for the Member's support, signature or sponsorship of CARE's legislative agenda items.
- **Offer yourself and CARE as a trusted ally**: CARE is a highly respected resource for U.S. global leadership, global development, humanitarian aid, and poverty eradication. Tell your Member or staff that CARE can provide any information they need to confidentially and effectively stand by CARE's legislative agenda. Leave your own, your RAM's or another CARE staffer's contact information behind.
- **Say "Thanks!":** Good manners, professionalism and respect are essential, whether you have your Member's support or not. Thank them for their time and for representing the constituents in their district who support CARE.

7. Follow up with the scheduler

- Confirm your meeting date, time, location or log-in information (if meeting virtually)
- Let them know who will attend your meeting and what the final agenda will be
- Get directions to the office or information about how to log in virtually
- Provide a number where you can be reached if anything changes

Don't Forget...

- **If you're meeting in person:** Make sure you have directions, transportation and time to park and/or walk to your Member's office.
- **If you're meeting online:** Make sure you have a quiet space, a computer, strong wi-fi connection, and the log-in information for your meeting.

8. At the meeting

Now that you've prepped for your in-district meeting, **get ready to make a difference just by being yourself**.


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- **Be on time**. Whether in the office or online, be ready to go at your specified meeting time. If you have to be late for any reason, call your Member's office and let them know.
- **Introduce yourself, mention that you live in your Member's district and why you advocate for CARE.** Practice this part in advance so you can say it all in just a couple sentences.
- **Follow your meeting plan** and discuss the agenda items assigned to you.
- **Swap contact info with your Member or staffer**. You'll use this to send a thank you email after the meeting, to provide answers to their questions and to stay in touch throughout the year.
- **Bring leave-behind materials** or provide links where staffers or the Member can learn more about the topics you discussed.
- **Take pictures** (if the entire delegation gives consent) to share with your RAM and post on social media!

9. After the meeting

- Schedule a few minutes with your delegates to **debrief** and make future plans.
- **Email your RAM** (if they didn't attend the meeting) with notes, comments or actions they should follow up on.
- Send a **thank you/follow up e-mail** to the person you met with.
  - Mention specific information from your meeting to jog their memory
  - Provide follow-up information on any questions they may have asked
  - Let them know that you'd like to stay in touch, and once again, offer CARE as a resource

Frequently Asked Questions

What if my Member or their staff member asks a question I don't know the answer to?
We call that a win because it creates an opportunity for you or someone at CARE to have a follow-up conversation and another chance to make an impression. If you're asked a question you don't know the answer to, just say, "I don't know, but I will pass the question on to someone at CARE and I'll make sure you get an answer." Jot down a note so you don't forget, then, get in touch with your RAM. They'll guide you on the best way to follow up.

What if my Member or staffer is argumentative?
It doesn't happen often because Members and their staff are professionals at communicating with passionate, opinionated constituents. Once in a while, however, you may encounter a representative who strongly disagrees with a topic on CARE's advocacy agenda or doesn't agree with or understand America's role as a global leader in foreign assistance. You never have to advocate or engage on CARE's behalf in a way that makes you uncomfortable. You are there as a CARE supporter, but also as a constituent. They are obliged to listen to you. Remember, even if you didn't vote for them, they work for you. Communicate your talking points, if possible, and thank them for listening. Take notes on any questions or comments they have and leave behind any appropriate materials.

What if I'm too shy, anxious, exhausted, cynical, or worried to advocate at a meeting?
Whether it's the stress of world events, speaking in public or talking to strangers, everybody gets a little anxious when it's time to advocate. Even those who do this a lot get nervous from time to time. We get it. It's natural! The issues we stand for are important and we care about them deeply. For some, however, anxiety stands in the way of their ability to participate in some forms of advocacy. That's ok! There are lots of ways you can use your voice and influence. Let's find what works for you. Here are some ideas:

- Tell your Regional Advocacy Manager what you are and are not comfortable with. They're here to support you and will never push you farther than you want your advocacy to go. They can help you design an advocacy plan that eases your mind, shares your voice and helps you be your most powerful.
- Post CARE's pre-made social media posts on your feeds and stories or, go to CARE's feeds and like, comment, and share.
- Educate your circle. Talk to your people; your friends and family, coworkers and neighbors and those who you trust will listen. Talk about the importance of U.S. leadership in building back a more just and equal world. These conversations make a difference.
- Ask friends to support you when advocacy opportunities make you nervous. It's easier to do hard things when a friend does them with us.