

EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

A GUIDE TO MEETING WITH YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

While it can be intimidating, meeting in person with your elected leaders is, by far, the **most effective form of advocacy**. Physically meeting with them is the best way to share what's important to you and to request their action, and you don't have to fly to Washington, D.C. to do it – all members of Congress have offices in your home state. In fact, they likely have a district office within driving distance, and spend portions of the year in that office for the very purpose of meeting with constituents **like you**.

World Vision encourages you to begin the process of getting to know your elected leaders and to develop a **relationship** with them, believing that God has given the Church a special role to play in speaking up for justice and holding elected leaders accountable to make decisions for the common good of all people, **including the poor**.

World Vision advocates for children and families around the world living in extreme poverty. Often, this means advocating for U.S. foreign policy and budget decisions that impact global maternal, newborn and child health, child protection, conflicts and fragile states and other foreign assistance issues.

Use this guide to engage your church and community networks in advocacy for these critical issues. It gives you step-by-step instructions about how to meet with your members of Congress in person in your area, and links to additional **resources** you'll need for a successful meeting. If you schedule a meeting with your senators or representatives, please let World Vision know by emailing us at **advocate@worldvision.org**. We're ready and excited to support you throughout the entire process.

We hope and pray this will be the beginning of a long journey for you and your church or community group of effective advocacy on behalf of the world's most vulnerable.

FIRST STEPS

1. **Locate your Representative.**

- To find your two U.S. Senators, visit www.senate.gov and enter your address. To find your representative in the U.S. House of representatives, visit www.house.gov and do the same.
- We each have three federal legislators who represent us—two Senators and one Representative. These members have offices in your home state/district where they and their staff can meet with you in person.
- You can meet with one of them, or with all three! Once you're on their website, find out which of their district offices is closest to where you live (usually under the "Contact Me" section of the website).

2. **Contact your Representative**

- Call the district office where you'd like to meet. Let the receptionist know that you are planning to send in a meeting request and ask for the name of the district scheduler and their contact information.
- Find out whether the scheduler prefers to receive meeting requests by email or fax and if they have a preferred form that they use.

3. **Schedule the meeting**

- Submit your meeting request with your information, as well as the names of other constituents who plan to attend with you (if this is not finalized, don't worry—you can update this later with the scheduler). Use the preferred method to send the request to your member's district scheduler. *See *Appendix for a sample meeting request*
- Two to three days after you send in your request, call the district scheduler to make sure he/she has received your request. Offices get a lot of requests, so you want to make sure yours doesn't get lost in the pile.
- Continue to follow up with the scheduler every few days to make sure your meeting gets scheduled. It can sometimes take several follow-up calls/emails to get your meeting scheduled. Persistence is key! Contact us at advocate@worldvision.org if you need assistance.
- If the member of Congress is unavailable, the scheduler will direct you to an aide who will meet with you. Don't be discouraged! This meeting is still very worthwhile. Aides will often recommend positions to members of Congress, and ensuring that they are well informed and aware of support in the district is very important.
- Confirm how much time you will have in the meeting with the congressperson or staff member.

BEFORE THE MEETING

1. **Find others to join you**

- Just like everyone else, members of Congress are impacted by personal relationships. Consider who might be the best people to bring with you to an in-district meeting (a prominent person in your community, someone with first-hand experience of the issue, etc.).
- Involve your church or other social networks as much as possible. Be sure they know why you are going and how they can specifically pray for both you and your members of Congress throughout the process.
- Ask your church leader if you can mention the campaign in a church service or to some small group gatherings.
- Brainstorm ways you might be able to show your members of Congress that others in your church or community agree with your position or request. Consider bringing hand-written cards from

congregation members, a signed petition, photos, or some other creative prop to help convey your message and its support.

2. Learn what is appealing to your Representative

- Get to know your member of Congress. Find out if there are any topics that he/she is especially passionate about and try tailoring your message to appeal to these areas.
- Make your message and request as personal as possible – you don't have to be an expert to have your views heard. Personal experience and sincerity about why you care about an issue makes a real impact!

3. Get acquainted with the issues & prepare

- Because time is limited during the meeting, be sure that you and the rest of your group have a clear understanding of the issue.
- Visit www.worldvision.org/beyond5 for tools and talking points that will help you and your group learn about the legislation and prepare for the meeting.
- On the day-of, meet an hour early with your group, or meet on a day prior to the meeting, to plan your agenda and what each person is going to say. Be sure that there is a clear point and flow to your message. World Vision has provided a sample meeting agenda in the appendices of this guide..
- Remember, everyone has a role to play, even if one person stays silent and prays the entire time!

DURING THE MEETING

1. Dress to impress: Business attire is appropriate.

2. Arrive early

- Arrive to the congressional office at a minimum of 15 minutes before your appointment
- Be sure to leave time for parking (often more difficult in large cities) and going through building security.
- Make sure you confirm how much time your representative (or their aide) has before you start, so you can adjust your message accordingly.

3. Introduce yourselves

- Tell your member of Congress who you are, who you represent (church, community group, etc.) and why you personally care about the issue you will discuss.
- Include personal stories, experiences or photos when possible. These things communicate passion that often inspires action.
- If your church or group is actively involved in helping find solutions to the problem you care about, be sure to share that too – then you can invite your representative to join you in finding long term solutions together.

4. Make a clear request, with a deadline

- Stay on track and keep the conversation focused.
- If you can't answer a question, commit to follow-up after you have done some more research or have contacted us at World Vision (advocate@worldvision.org) for assistance.
- Don't just ask for your representative's broad "support," ask them to take specific action by a specified time, and let them know you will follow-up to see if they did.

5. Pray

- If your member of Congress is a person of faith, ask them if they would be comfortable if your group prayed for them before you leave. This can be a powerful way to encourage them and strengthen them to act wisely about the issues you discussed.
- You may find a specific verse of Scripture that's relevant – use it in your prayer or leave it behind with them to come back to.
- Don't pressure your representative to pray with you, or be offended if they prefer not to – have your group pray for them outside of their office after the meeting instead.

6. Leave your request in writing, and something to help remind them of your visit

- You can download concise information related to the issue or legislation to leave with your member of Congress at www.worldvision.org/beyond5.
- You may also want to leave them with signed cards or photos of your congregation, community group or sponsored children, or some other prop or small gift to help them remember the issue you discussed. Be sure any gift you leave behind is valued under \$10, for legal purposes. Be creative!

7. Take a photo

- Snap a picture of your group with your member of Congress, and if possible, share it on social media channels like Facebook, a blog, or Twitter.

8. Invite future connections

- Invite them to attend a larger gathering at your church or campus in the future. Perhaps your group could host them for a town hall meeting to discuss the issue you met about at greater length.

AFTER THE MEETING

1. Thank your representative & follow-up

- Members of Congress rarely get thanked – so be sure to send them a letter or email on behalf of your church or group to let them know you appreciate them and their time.
- If you asked your representative to take a specific action, follow-up to check their progress and encourage them to continue to fulfill your request in a timely manner.

2. Tell us what happened

- Contact us at advocate@worldvision.org and let us know how the meeting went.
- Was your member of Congress receptive? Did you learn any key information about the bill's process? Will they cosponsor or support any specific legislation discussed?

3. Share with others

- Every U.S. Senator has a Twitter account, as well as most members of the House of Representatives. Tweet them directly, and share your photo, to publicly thank them and stay in contact (they'll appreciate the free press!). You can also tag World Vision so that we can retweet and share your post with other World Vision advocates (@WVUSAdvocacy).
- Tell others in your church, school or community about your experience and encourage them to get involved. Your example may encourage them to try advocacy in the future as well.

Sample Tweet

Thank you [[@Tag Your Representative here](#)] for mtg w/ us 2day abt [[insert legislation here](#)]. We r grateful 4 your leadership! [@WVUSAdvocacy](#)

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE SCHEDULING REQUEST

Copy the following scheduling request into an email or new document and fill in appropriate information where indicated:

EMAIL SUBJECT: A meeting to discuss [INSERT ISSUE OR LEGISLATION HERE]

Dear [YOUR SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE'S NAME],

I am writing to formally request a meeting with you on [INSERT DATES OF DESIRED MEETING, GIVE 2-3 OPTIONS] at your district office in [CITY IN WHICH YOU'D LIKE TO MEET], to discuss [INSERT ISSUE OR LEGISLATION HERE].

Attending the meeting will be myself, [FILL IN YOUR NAME] and the following constituents in your area: [INSERT NAMES OF FELLOW PARTICIPANTS, CITIES OF RESIDENCE AND ANY ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS].

Thank you for considering my request. Please feel free to contact me at [YOUR PHONE NUMBER] or via email at [YOUR EMAIL].

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS]

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE IN-DISTRICT MEETING AGENDA

Your entire meeting is likely to last only 15-30 minutes, so be sure to plan ahead and come prepared with what you want to say, the order of the meeting, and who is going to say what. Here is a sample agenda for a 30 minute meeting to help you get started.

1. Introductions (5 minutes)

Allow a brief introduction of all the participants to begin the conversation comfortably. Some information you may wish to include:

- a. Names and occupations (and anything else you want them to know about you – are you a parent or veteran, active in the community, etc.?)
- b. Where you live in their district and how long you've lived there – be sure to let them know that you are their constituent!
- c. Note if you have a relevant connection with the representative or senator.

2. Overview of the legislation or issue (5 minutes)

- a. Share some high level and/or locally relevant statistics about the issue you would like them to address (World Vision can provide you with some resources).
- b. You may find it most appropriate to share personal stories, photos or videos that illustrate these facts at this point (see Section 3, below).
- c. Give a quick, simple overview of the proposed legislation and why it would provide solutions to the problems you shared. Find out if your representative is already familiar with the legislation or proposed solution. If they are, you don't need to repeat facts they already know. If they are unfamiliar with the bill, highlight the two or three aspects that you think will most appeal to the representative (save potentially controversial issues for later in the meeting).

3. Personal stories (10 minutes)

This is the most important part of your meeting! Your elected official wants to know why this matters to you and your community – your experience, not statistics, are going to help convince them. Some questions you may consider answering to help tell your story are:

- a. Why is this important to you? What sparked your passion for the issue? What drives your concern?
- b. What personal ties do you have to this issue? Do you know anyone that has been affected by it? Have you witnessed it firsthand?
- c. This is a great place to share relevant photos or even a short video that puts a face to the statistics or issue you will share about.

4. Conversation & Closing (10 minutes)

- a. Ask them if they have any questions. Do your best to answer them, but never make up an answer. If you do not know an answer, please check our website or email us at advocate@worldvision.org for assistance. This actually provides a good opportunity to follow up with them after the meeting.
- b. Ask if you can count on them to support the legislation or respond to your request. If they are unsure, offer to provide them with any additional information they may need to make an informed decision. If they are supportive, encourage them to talk to their fellow legislators about the issue and ask if there is anything else you can do to ensure success of the legislation.
- c. Ask if you can pray for them before you leave. If they decline, let them know you will keep them in your prayers after the meeting and encourage or affirm them in some other way.
- d. Thank them for their time, leave them with relevant information, a memento to remember your meeting or request, and exchange any information for necessary follow-up.
- e. Ask to take a photo and publically thank them on social media after the meeting.