



In-District Advocacy Toolkit

Take Advantage of Time At Home

Build a Meaningful Relationship
With Your Senators and Representatives

In this advocacy toolkit, you will learn:

- ⇒ Why in-district advocacy is critical to your success;
- ⇒ Easy ways you can take action, whether you have 1 minute, 15 minutes, 30 minutes or more
- ⇒ How to share your efforts and build momentum

Advocacy Starts at Home

In-District Activities Critical to Your Success

During the election season Congress will have a longer than normal recess period, stretching from the start of the conventions in mid July through Labor Day and then the entirety of October through the elections in November. A third of the U.S. Senate and every member of the House of Representatives is up for reelection, and during these recess periods more so than ever, members will be looking for the opportunity to showcase the benefit of their work in Washington.

Take advantage of upcoming in-district periods and show your Senators and Representatives how NDC's work, through utilization of federal investments is having a positive impact on their areas. There is no substitute for a tour of a new business, visiting a project under development, or taking part in a ribbon-cutting—events where legislators can meet and hear about the effect the from constituents and local officials leave a large and lasting impression of the effectiveness of the federal programs and financial tools we are using to drive economic development in our communities.

In this toolkit, you will find tips for three powerful actions to cultivate a new relationship or nurture an existing relationship with your Senators and Representatives.

- ◆ **Invite your Senators and Representatives to visit a project.** Show them why the work we do is important to their district, and how that work is supported by federal programs.
- ◆ **Meet one-on-one and bring some friends.** In-district meetings during recess are a great way to keep the issue in the forefront of their minds and back up what they have heard from us in D.C. It also allows you to bring business owners, community stakeholders and other beneficiaries to validate your message.

This is a key time for our client communities and partners to showcase the impact of federal investment. NDC can help our local partners make these connections. The more members of Congress see the work at home, the more likely they will be to support our work!

Thank you for your advocacy.

Robert W. Davenport
President
National Development Council

We Can Help!

Get Support On Your In-District Activities

The DC Office will provide you with an outline of any members of Congress's policy work on our issues— contact us at:

202-400-3680, advocacy@ndconline.org

We can help draft and edit materials for meetings, op-eds, or letters to the editor.

We would also like to help promote and share any events you are planning—regardless of how small or big the action—everything counts! You can keep up to date on these actions by following NDC on Facebook and Twitter.



Facebook.com/NationalDevelopmentCouncil



Twitter.com/NatlDevCouncil

Contact NDC for assistance. We look forward to hearing from you.

Where Can I Find the Congressional Calendar?

The Congressional Calendars can be viewed online **U.S. House of Representatives:** http://www.majorityleader.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2016_ANNUAL_CALENDAR2.pdf
U.S. Senate: http://www.senate.gov/legislative/resources/pdf/2016_calendar.pdf

Resources

NDC participates in Key Advocacy coalitions who have excellent material and State specific information.

- ◆ For Low Income Housing Tax Credits - [Affordable Rental Housing A.C.T.I.O.N](#)
- ◆ For New Markets Tax Credits- [New Markets Tax Credit Coalition](#)
- ◆ For Federal Investment in Housing and Community Development - [Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding](#)

We are also able to provide you with information on tax exempt bonds, public private partnerships, and other issues upon request.

Show and Tell

Invite your Senators and Representatives to visit a project.

Having an elected official or his/her staff make an on-site visit to a project made possible by federal investment is one of the most powerful things you can do to build a relationship and advocate for our legislative priorities. By showing your Senators and Representatives first-hand the work that you do, how you serve your community, and how these federal programs support your efforts, you can make a lasting impression. This is your opportunity to shine. At the same time you create an opportunity for the official to demonstrate his/her work.

Showcase the Community

- ◆ Always try to organize your event in such a way that your Senators and Representatives can speak to, and meet with, a significant number of constituents.
- ◆ Some ideas include inviting your Senators and Representatives to:
 - ◇ Meet residents of the community that you serve.
 - ◇ Celebrate a project's success at a ceremony and say a few words in support of the work
 - ◇ Receive an award from a community partner for the good work that they have done in support of your cause.
- ◆ Connect the Dots. You are not only showcasing NDC and our partners, but the federal programs that support your work. This can help turn your Representative or Senator into a champion for the federal programs we rely on.

Make it About the Member of Congress

- ◆ If your Senator or Representative responds strongly to business interests, be sure to have it business focused and give the business owners a prominent role.
 - ◇ Ensure the business owner will speak to the necessity of the federal investment to make these projects possible.
- ◆ If your Senator or Representative is on a committee that addresses the needs of a special population, such as veterans, be sure that they are featured prominently on the agenda. In short, match your program to the interest areas of your Member of Congress. This information will be in the briefing that the Washington Office provides to you.
- ◆ Personalize the experience by inviting a constituent who has benefited from the project can share a personal story of how your organization impacted their life.
 - ◇ Individual clients or local government leaders can put a human face on the work you do.

Things to Remember Before and During the Visit

- ◆ What two or three points do you want to drive home with your elected officials? Make sure flyers, handouts, and remarks reflect those points.
- ◆ Determine what day is the busiest at the site where you have chosen to hold the event? This is when you will want to try to hold the visit, since it will confirm the success of the project.
- ◆ **Invite your Senators and Representatives** as far in advance as possible—they receive many invites every day, so make your invitation stand out. Let them know you are flexible and willing to accommodate the Member's schedule.
 - ◆ When scheduling a meeting in the district or state, begin by calling that district or state office, as each office has a different system for scheduling. Tell them you live or work in the Member of Congress' district, and ask them how to submit a formal meeting request. Some members require meeting and event requests to be in writing and submitted via fax or e-mail. Others require a web form be filled out, while some are fine with phone requests.
- ◆ Maximize the value of the visit by inviting media to attend the event. Make sure the Member knows about the media's involvement in advance and offer to coordinate with the Communications Director in the D.C. office.
- ◆ Be sure to send information on the event to NDC—we can provide assistance both with briefings and with social media.
- ◆ During the visit, volunteer NDC to serve as a resource for their offices.

Things to Remember After the Visit

- ◆ Send thank you letters, including any press releases, news articles, and photos from the event.
- ◆ Share photos and articles via email and through social media.
- ◆ Make sure that you provide the name, email address, and direct phone number of a person in your organization to serve as a constituent services liaison for the Congressional office.

Meet One-on-One with your Representatives

Be at the Forefront of Their Minds

A one-on-one meeting with your Senators and Representatives, or their staff, to discuss the issues carries much more weight than signing a petition, sending a letter, or making a phone call. Make your visit a success by following these pointers:

Preparing for the Meeting

- ◆ Know the politician. Find out their background, information on the committees they're on, and other positions they hold that might be relevant. This information helps draw a direct link between the Senator or Representative and your advocacy efforts. The DC office can help you.
- ◆ Focus on one or two issues. You won't have time to deal with multiple issues well at the meeting; choose the top priority that demonstrates our work.
- ◆ Know the issue. If you don't already know, learn the facts, figures, arguments, and counter-arguments surrounding the issue before your meeting. Knowledge is the cornerstone of advocacy.
- ◆ Make it personal. Sharing a real-life example of how your organization has impacted their district will put a human face on the work you do.
- ◆ Call us. We are here to help you successfully frame the issues and understand them inside out. We can offer talking points, issue briefs, research, and specific information about the Senators and Representatives that you are going to meet.

At the Meeting

- ◆ Don't skip the preliminaries. Introduce everyone present and their organizations. Thank the legislator for the opportunity to meet. Confirm how much time you have and respect those limits.
- ◆ Designate one person as the lead speaker. Cutting down on the number of people talking shows consensus, allows the Senator and Representative, and their staff, to focus on the message, and reduces the chances of getting sidetracked.
- ◆ Listen. Finding out their views is just as important as conveying yours. Ask genuine questions and respect their answers. They often contain valuable information.
- ◆ Be clear and ask for what you want. Don't walk away from a Congressional meeting without asking your Senators and Representatives to take the specific action that you want them to take.
- ◆ End with thank you. Regardless of the outcome, thank your Senators and Representatives for the opportunity to meet and raise your concerns. Don't forget to thank their staff as well.

After the Meeting

- ◆ Follow up. Send your Senators and Representatives a formal thank you, forward any additional information, and create a written confirmation of any agreed-to actions.

Short on Time?

You Can Still Make a Difference

Do you have 5 minutes?

- ◆ Write a message on your elected officials' Facebook or Twitter pages using **key messages** on our legislative priorities and their impact on people and communities—encourage others to share! Include **state-specific information** when you craft your short message.

Do you have 15 minutes?

- ◆ Send a letter or email to your Senators and Representatives urging them to support the federal programs you are using in your communities.

Do you have 30 minutes?

- ◆ Write a Letter to the Editor
 - ◇ A Letter to the Editor is typically very short, around 200 words, and in response to a to an article the media outlet recently published. **Read tips on how to write and submit it** (page 9).

Do you have an hour?

- ◆ Attend a town hall meeting.
 - ◇ Many elected officials host and/or attend town hall meetings in August as a way to see what is on the voter's minds— you can attend! Visit your legislators' websites to find out the time and date of any upcoming town hall meetings.
 - ◇ Don't be afraid to stand up and ask questions. Make your questions precise and direct! **Contact us** if you want help crafting questions.
- ◆ Write an Op-Ed
 - ◇ Submitting an opinion piece to your local or state press is a great way to bring attention to the impact you are making in your community. Highlight the projects and the effect specific federal programs you are using to make them a reality. **Find out how to write and submit it** (page 9).
- ◆ Create a short video
 - ◇ Seeing is believing. Create a video about a great project by interviewing a local leader, business owner, and an individual from the community. Then send it to your Representative and Senators—don't forget to **share it with us too and we'll help you spread the word.**

Share Success Locally

Write an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

Submitting an opinion piece to your local or state press is a great way to bring attention to the impact of the in your community. Highlight the projects and the impact federal investment has had on economic growth as well as creating and retaining jobs where they are needed the most.

Editors do not publish every letter or op-ed, but they do pay attention—especially if it is well-written and timely. A Letter to the Editor is typically very short, around 200 words, and in response to a to an article the media outlet recently published. An op-ed is a longer opinion piece that provides information on a subject that would be of interest to the outlets readers. Therefore it is important to demonstrate how the issue affects individuals locally. To find out how to submit a Letter to the Editor either call or look on the outlet’s website.

- ◆ **Be timely.** Local outlets may not be consistently writing about our specific legislative priorities, though articles on economic development, tax, and budget should start to ramp up as the presidential primaries progress, making it easier to find an article and relate it to concerns about the future of the our programs. The budget, unemployment, and the health of the economy can also be used as a lead-in, depending on whether you have projects that may align well.
- ◆ **Follow the rules.** Make sure to adhere to the outlet’s guidelines on length. Spell everything correctly and pay close attention to grammar—letters are not usually edited, rather the outlets select well-written letters that meet their guidelines. Include your name, full address, and phone number.
- ◆ **Be concise.** Include your main points in the first paragraph even if your media outlet length guidelines are greater than 200 words. Two to three points are ideal.
- ◆ **Avoid jargon and acronyms.** Explain points in “plain English.” This makes the information more understandable and accessible to a wider audience.

Email your letter to insure timeliness. To do this, paste the text into the body of an email—DO NOT SEND AS AN ATTACHMENT. You may also fax it, but sending it electronically is generally the preferred way to receive letters.

Seeing Is Believing

How to Invite Your Member to Visit a Project

[DATE]

The Honorable [NAME]
US House of Representatives/U.S. Senate
[ADDRESS]
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative/Senator [LAST NAME]:

Federal spending and tax reform continue to dominate many of the policy conversations happening in Washington, but often with little context as to what these policies and decisions mean for communities and the people living in them. We want to draw your attention to the impact the [FEDERAL PROGRAM] has had on local economies in low income urban and rural communities in [STATE]. To better illustrate this point, I would like to invite you to tour [PROJECT], a project financed through [FEDERAL PROGRAM] located in [CITY], to hear from [local business/constituents/local officials].

[PROJECT] is just one example of the impact the [FEDERAL PROGRAM] has in communities throughout [STATE]. [INSERT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT NATIONAL IMPACT]

[COMPANY] would be honored if you would join us for tour and discussion on [TAX REFORM OR TYPE OF FEDERAL FUNDING] and its effect on the people of [STATE]. We would like to invite you to join us from [TIME, e.g. 8:00-9:30 am on DATE]; but we are flexible if there is another time that would work better for your schedule. [DESCRIBE WHAT S/HE WILL SEE, I.E. We would give you a tour of our facility and provide time for you to meet some of our employees.]

I will follow up this request with your office or you may reach me at [PHONE/EMAIL].

Thank you for your attention and we hope to see you here soon.

Sincerely,
[YOUR NAME]
[TITLE]
[COMPANY]

Note: Send this invitation to the local office via email—Ken Baker (kbaker@ndconline.org / 202-400-3680) in the Washington Office can provide the contact information.