

TOWN HALL ADVOCACY GUIDE:

Find an Event Near You: <https://indivisible.org/events>

How to engage lawmakers at Town Hall Meetings:

1. Be Prepared

Most people don't hit their Member of Congress with a well-researched, well-rehearsed pitch. They just say what they think – which has value. But those that come to town hall meetings with thoughtful arguments, good data, and persuasive stories are more likely to be remembered. **If you want to go the extra mile, contact his/her office and request to be given some private one on one time with your Representative prior to or immediately following the event.**

2. Tell a Personal Story

This is why Members of Congress hold town hall meetings – to get first-hand accounts of the impact of policies on their constituents. Think in advance of how a policy might affect you, your family, your business, or your community. Whether the congressman supports you or not, they want to hear your story.

3. Use Numbers If You Have Them

Politicians live for one thing: 50% plus 1. This keeps them re-elected and in a job. Nearly every person to come before a Member of Congress represents other constituents, either by a class or as a spokesperson. Use those numbers. “I have 50 employees,” “I represent 100 people in my union,” “There are 500 people in my community that think just like me.” The legislator is trying to do the math the minute you stand up – make it easy for him/her.

4. Be RESPECTFUL

You'd be surprised how many people start a conversation with, “I pay your salary, so you better listen to me.” It doesn't matter if you're talking to your grocer or a public official —

starting any conversation with another person in a rude manner is NO WAY to persuade them. Members of Congress want to hear your views, you don't need to badger them to get your message through.

5. Go in Groups

Nothing says "listen to me" to a public official like a mob (of course, a polite one). This is not to suggest that you should bring pitch forks and torches to your next town hall meeting. But a chorus is better than a solo performance. Said another way, without friends, you risk looking like the "loner nut" that sometimes dominates the meeting.

6. Talk to Staff

Every congressman brings **STAFF** to town hall meetings. They may seem to blend into the woodwork, but a sharp citizen seeks them out. **Talk to them before the meeting; get their business card; tell them your story (as well as asking a public question at the meeting).** Nearly all congressional town hall meetings are attended by a senior staffer in the office, the State Director or District Director. **This is a rich opportunity to build a relationship with someone who has the Senator's ear.**

7. Leave Paper

Town hall meetings are usually staffed by district-office staff who do not deal with legislative issues on a daily basis. If you leave **background memos or talking points**, they'll likely be shared with the Washington office and the legislative assistant who covers your issue.

8. Follow-up Politely

POLITELY persistent people persuade politicians. Congressional offices are harried, so they often respond to the squeaky wheel, the one who just **follows up with a phone call** after attending a town hall meeting.

9. Demonstrate You're Not Going Away

If you **continue to show your presence** at town hall meetings, the legislator must deal with you...if only to avoid an uncomfortable encounter at a future town hall meeting.

10. Use Other Means to Communicate

The town hall meeting is only one way available to citizens to build relationships with lawmakers – and the key to any long term strategy is **relationship building**.

CMF's latest report supports this concept, "[Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement](#)." This research, built on 12 years of data and surveys working with congressional offices, offers a roadmap to citizens who genuinely wish to influence public policy. By recognizing that their voices makes a difference, and [using those voices in a variety of vehicles and strategies](#) – including town hall meetings – citizens will realize that interacting with Congress can be rewarding, insightful, and successful!

Source: Bradford Fitch

PREPARE FOR A TOWN HALL EVENT OR MEETING:

Congressional recess is a special time. It's when Members of Congress (MoCs) come back to their home districts for extended periods of time to meet with their constituents and hold public events. These recess periods are when your MoCs prefer to hold town halls, ribbon cuttings, and otherwise garner good local press for themselves.

Below are some expanded tips and strategies on how to maximize this opportunity to influence your MoCs. Keep it up. We can win.

Summary

Prepare for Your Town Hall.

1. Find out when and where your MoC's next Town Hall will be held.
2. Tell everyone you can—including us—about the event.

3. Hold a group meeting dedicated to preparing for the Town Hall.
4. Develop a list of questions your group will ask your MoC during the event.
5. Create your own media strategy for raising the profile of your Town Hall.

Be Strategic at Your Town Hall.

1. Get there early and get organized.
2. Make your group's presence known immediately.
3. Tell your stories to your MoC.
4. Be polite yet persistent.
5. Show your approval or disapproval as appropriate.
6. Record everything.

Get Back to Work After the Town Hall.

1. Reach out to the press—and us!
2. Share all of your images and videos.
3. Thank your MoC—and tell them that one Town Hall is not enough.

Prepare

This section describes how to prepare for a town hall in five simple steps. First, find out when and where the Town Hall will be held. Second, advertise it. Third, hold a group meeting to prepare for it. Fourth, develop a set of

questions that you want your MoC to answer at the Town Hall. Finally, create your own media strategy to get press coverage for it.

- 1. Find out when your MoC's next public town hall event is being held.** Sometimes these events are announced well in advance. But often MoCs will delay announcing the specific time, date, or location to try to suppress turnout. Though town halls and similar forums are technically "public," they are often only announced through channels that are friendly to your MoC (e.g., a Chamber of Commerce listserv email). If you can't find announcements about your MoC's next town hall, use www.contactingcongress.org to speak directly with a staff member. When you call, be friendly and say to the staffer, "Hi, I'm [your name] and I live at [your address]. I'd like to know when [your MoC's name's] next town hall forum will be." If they don't know, ask to be added to the email list they use to announce events.
- 2. Tell everyone you can about the upcoming town hall.** Create a Facebook event and ask fellow groups, members, & admins to share and invite their networks. National press outlets use this kind of information to decide which events to cover. You should also draft a press advisory listing the event's details and send it to every local member of the press you can find. Be shameless—email it to print and television reporters, then tag them when you post the advisory to Twitter. Many of them welcome tips like this and go out of their way to make sure their email addresses and Twitter profiles are public and easy to find. You can find more tips for engaging with press in [this helpful resource](#).

3. **Hold a group meeting to prepare for the town hall.** This is a chance for you to identify your best public speakers, to determine which questions you'll ask your MoC, and to develop a plan for the day of the event. Here are some principles and ideas to cover in your town hall planning meeting: **Your job isn't to convince your MoC of anything.** It is to create the political conditions necessary to force them into a new position—or to replace them. This is a marathon, not a sprint and every mark against them will matter—especially footage of them flailing in a town hall with you and your group.
4. **You are storytellers and your neighbors are your audience.** Be honest. Be vulnerable. **Your story matters, and you deserve the chance to share it.** Sharing stories can be tough, especially if it's very personal—so to get ready, you might want to practice with fellow members of your group or write down key points that you know you want to make.
5. **Your MoC is mostly just equipped to parrot talking points.** Many MoCs are surprisingly bad at relating to or engaging with people. If you push them out of their comfort zone and off their talking points—if you **force them to engage** with real stories and with pointed questions—they will go in all kinds of directions. **You win when you create political pressure on your MoC.** You also win when you create political support for them to do the right thing.
6. **Know your strengths.** It is totally OK to show up and be a supportive body at the town hall—in fact, the success of your group's event

depends on hundreds if not thousands of your members doing just that. Not everyone has to speak or lead - just being there is a huge step.

7. Before the town hall, work together to prepare questions ahead of time for your group to ask. Your questions should be sharp and unequivocal—make them commit to a position or give a direct yes or no response to your question. If possible, include information on the MoC’s record, votes they’ve taken, or statements they’ve made. Gathering this information should be part of your preparation for the town hall. Your questions should focus on a limited number of issues to maximize impact.

8. Create your own media strategy for the event.

Find out which local reporters have covered your MoC and reach out to them—make sure they capture your perspective when they cover the town hall. Tell them why you and your group are attending the town hall. Also, you should have a unique hashtag for your town hall so that we and other reporters can easily find it on Twitter (e.g. #PainPatientsVote). Take all the photos and videos that you can, then use that hashtag on Twitter so that we can help spread the word about all your great work.

At the Town Hall

This section describes how to maximize the impact of your Town Hall in six simple steps. First, get there early and get organized. Second, make your group’s presence known immediately. Third, tell your stories to your MoC. Fourth, be polite but persistent. Fifth, show your approval or disapproval of your MoC’s answers as appropriate. Finally, record and share everything.

1. **Get there early, meet up, and get organized.** The venue will usually open its doors an hour or so before the event. As many of you as possible should arrive as early as possible to begin distributing signs, handouts of the questions and speaker list, and reviewing your ground rules. Then, head into the venue and spread out. It may even be helpful to have a floor plan of the venue in-hand so that you can direct your members to certain areas as they come in to prevent clustering together. This is important, because if your MoC's staff sense a bloc of opposition from one side of the room, they'll simply ignore it.
2. **Make your Indivisible presence known early.** Town halls are public events, and a chance to demonstrate the strength of your group to the MoC, to the local media, and to your fellow town hall attendees. Take advantage of this moment: **Start with the Pledge of Allegiance.** Seriously. This isn't grade school, though sometimes your MoC will act like it is. But you are engaging in a vital civic act—you're meeting with your Representative or Senator to discuss the most important issues to you and your community. So start your town hall with a public recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. When you reach the end and it's time to say "Indivisible, with liberty and justice for all", let the crowd know how strong your group is by shouting "Indivisible" in unison. This simple act of citizenship is also a powerful, symbolic act of solidarity—and it will resonate within your town hall and beyond.
3. **Proclaim the Facts.** This is an opportunity to show strength and educate the public. When introducing yourself to other attendees or to the MoC, let them know which local group you're a part of, and what your group stands for. For local attendees, you might be able to **recruit**

new group members into your group. For the MoC, you'll demonstrate the support your group has in the community, and that will give you more power the next time you call or visit their district office.

4. **Get ready to weigh in!** After the MoC opens up the floor, everyone in your group who's ready to speak should raise their hands. **Ask your questions.** If you've come as an organized group, you can start to go through the list of questions that you've already prepared together. **Tell your stories.** Personal stories have the power to disrupt a MoC's normal procedure for interacting with constituents. Your MoC may be prepared with their own set of alternative facts on health care or the opioid crisis, but there's no way to deflect or dodge when faced with a powerful personal story.
5. **Be POLITE but persistent, and demand real answers.** MoCs are very good at deflecting or dodging questions they don't want to answer. Don't let them get away with moving on before they've answered your question. If the MoC dodges, ask a follow-up question. If they aren't giving you real answers, then call them out for it. Here are a few tips:
6. **Don't give up the mic until you're satisfied with the answer.** If you've asked a sensitive question, a staffer will often try to limit your ability to follow up by taking the microphone back immediately after you finish speaking. They can't do that if you keep a firm hold on the mic. If they object, then say politely but loudly: "I'm not finished. The MoC is hasn't answered my question. Why are you trying to stop me from following up?" Use the crowd to your advantage: ask them to cheer or

stand in solidarity if they want the MoC to answer your question before moving on.

7. **Keep the pressure on.** After one member of your group finishes a question, everyone should raise their hands again. The next member of the group to be called on should move down the list of questions and ask the next one. If the MoC moves on to you without addressing the previous question, don't be afraid to restate it. **Anticipate their efforts to dismiss or undermine you.**
8. **Record everything!** Assign several people in your group to use a smart phone or video camera to record other advocates asking questions and the MoC's response. While written transcripts are nice, unfavorable exchanges caught on video can be devastating for MoCs. These clips can be shared through social media and picked up by local and national media. Please familiarize yourself with your state and local laws that govern recording, along with any applicable Senate or House rules. These laws and rules vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

After the Town Hall

This section describes what to do after your Town Hall in three simple steps. First, reach out to the press. Second, share all of your images and videos. Finally, thank your MoC—and tell them that one town hall is not enough.

1. **Reach out to media, during and after the town hall.** If there's media at the town hall, the people who asked questions should approach them afterward and offer to speak about their concerns. When the event is

over, you should engage local reporters on Twitter or by email and offer to provide an in-person account of what happened, as well as your pictures or videos. Example Twitter outreach: “**.@reporter I was at Rep. Smith’s town hall in Springfield today. Large group asked about pain relief for intractable pain patients. I have video & happy to chat.**” *Note: It’s important to make this a public tweet by including the period before the journalist’s Twitter handle. Making this public will make the journalist more likely to respond to ensure they get the intel first.*

2. **Share everything.** Post pictures, video, your thoughts about the event, etc., to social media. Tag the MoC’s office and encourage others to share widely. Also, always tag us on Twitter ([@painwarriorsteam](#)) and send pictures, videos, and everything else to us at info@painwarriorsunite.com
3. We’ll amplify all of your great work and help you get press attention—something your MoC desperately wants to avoid.
4. **Tell your MoC—and the press—that one town hall is not enough.** Showing up to listen to your constituents questions and concerns once every few months is not acceptable. MoCs block off days at a time to meet with campaign contributors, industry lobbyists, and other special interests—they owe you at least as much time. Your MoCs should listen to their district, not just their party, and the only way they can do that well is by spending a lot of time with you.

Source: Indivisible.org