

## Purpose

This guide is intended to assist UU members and groups in planning, organizing, conducting, and documenting meetings with their legislators, either in-person or by virtual means.

- Acting together as UUs we can sharpen our denominational presence and have a greater impact.
- In 2020 we showed the power of UUs to move votes, now we must show our power to support needed reforms and new policy ideas.

The main thing to remember is that you can do this, and your bravery is needed for social justice. While few things worth doing are easy, they are often fulfilling, and social justice advocacy is such. You are moving the moral arc of the universe towards justice. By living your values in community and solidarity for justice, you are making what **Representative Lewis** called “Good Trouble” and strengthening what **Rev. Dr. King** and **Gandhi** understood as “soul force.”

You are not alone. You stand with generations in the struggle for justice as we work towards the best version of our nation’s potential. You are siding with love, helping to build a beloved community, and working towards our collective liberation. You are doing your part to dismantle the interlocking injustices that hamper our human condition and restrain the human spirit.

Take heart, this work has meaning and impact on you and your community.

## Process in Brief - More Details Are Below

1. Commit to trying to organize a meeting with your Representative or Senator.
2. If possible, gather friends and like-minded allies from your congregation and community. Get a commitment they will try to join the meeting once a date and time has been set.
3. Gather the needed contact information and check if your member of Congress has spoken on or acted on the topic you are interested in discussing.
4. Craft your email. State your purpose -- a [virtual/phone] meeting -- and the topic. Provide some flexibility on dates and times so office staff can meet your preferences as possible.
5. Inform your friends of the details and set a time to get together to prepare for the meeting.
6. Gather to practice. Even 30 minutes prior to a 30-minute meeting will go a long way in preparations. Go over the purpose, roles, and tone you want to achieve. Discuss your witness/stories.
7. Hold the meeting.
8. Report your [results](#) -- beautiful or ugly, share what happened.
9. Send at least one thank you email restating your “ASK” and if possible a witness/story.
10. Begin again in love. Take on another office.

## Preparing for Outreach

- [Find Your US Representative](#) – House official site.
- [Find Your US Senator](#) – Senate official site.
- [GovTrack.US](#) – Find Members of Congress; Track bills that interest you and much more.
- [Congress.gov](#) – Information about your Members of Congress; Congressional links; Legislative activity (sponsors; text and status of bills; related bills, etc); Nominations and much more.
- [Office of the Clerk – U.S. House of Representatives](#) – Downloadable list of members data; members with committee assignments; official list with members phone numbers; member district offices with mailing addresses.
- [Office of the Secretary of the Senate](#) – Many resources to help understand the Senate and engage your Senators in an informed way.

## Setting Up the Meeting

- Decide what topic you wish to pursue with your member of Congress and what you want to achieve in the meeting. What will you ask the member to do?
- Conduct some research to determine the member's position on the relevant issues based on related votes or published information.
- Identify who will attend the meeting and when they are available.

### **Make the Meeting Arrangements:**

- Check your member's websites to see if they have specific instructions on setting up a meeting. Meetings are usually 30 minutes long.
  - If there aren't specific instructions on how to set up a meeting, try calling the in-district office and ask to set up a meeting, either in-person or using whatever virtual platform is preferred by the office.
  - If you cannot reach the district office, call the D.C. office and tell them you are a constituent looking to set up a meeting.
  - Chances are that your representative or senator won't be able to make your meeting in person and you'll meet with one of their staff. Don't be discouraged by this or think that the meeting is less important.
  - Once you are able to get a staffer on the phone, tell them that you are a constituent (and/or that you are calling on behalf of a group of constituents) that you'd like to request a meeting with your member of Congress, or if they aren't available, with the staffer who handles your topic of interest (e.g. voting rights, money in politics, democracy reform).

- You'll likely be instructed to follow up by email with the scheduler or to fill out a web form. Here is a [sample message for arranging a meeting](#) that you can copy, paste, and edit.
- If there is no staffer charged with handling a specific topic listed online, you can call the office directly or ask the scheduling staffer who the best contact might be.
- If you run into roadblocks, don't give up!
  - Most Congressional district offices are open during regular business hours, 9am-5pm.
  - DC offices are Eastern Time.
  - Keep calling and emailing until you're able to get the name and contact information for the staffer who handles your topic, or until a scheduler is able to set up a meeting for you.

## Preparing for the Meeting

- Prepare the needed materials for the meeting:
  - Meeting agenda (see Sample Agenda below under The Meeting)
  - Leave behind materials that describe your group's position on the issue (see [Sample Leave Behind Document](#) from the Faithful Democracy Coalition - yours does not need to be this fancy)
- Hold a pre-meeting with attendees to agree on the agenda, specific topics to be discussed, questions to be asked, and what roles attendees will play in the meeting, including:
  - **Leader** (opens & closes the meeting, keeps things on track)
  - **Subject matter expert** (can go into depth on the topic)
  - **Storyteller** (delivers the message with witness/a personal story)
  - **Notetaker** (records list of attendees and detailed comments on what the staffer/legislator said; enters notes onto [Google Form](#))
  - **Post-meeting follow-up** (sends thank you message, leave behind document, any materials that were agreed to be shared)
- Send agenda and meeting connection information to attendees.
- Send a list of attendees, topic to be discussed, and leave behind information to legislator/staff member who will be attending the meeting.

## The Meeting

The point of these meetings is to make sure your senator or representative knows who you are, what groups you represent, what your main concerns are, and what you want the member to do.

### Quick Tips

- Respect the member's (or the staffer's) office and time. Meetings are usually 30 minutes long.
- Thank them for something (a good vote, a thing the member said in the news, or even just taking the time to meet).
- Talk about why this issue is important to you. Talk from the heart.
- Make a clear and direct ask. For example: "Will the senator co-sponsor legislation to reform our democracy?"
- Then listen.
- Lastly, try to enjoy the meeting. It's ok to be a little nervous before these meetings, especially if it's your first one ever.
- In general, this should be a positive experience, even if your representative isn't supportive. At worst they'll tell you they don't agree. At best, you'll identify a champion who will make some much-needed changes. This is the best way to find out!

### Sample Agenda

- **Opening** - Thank them for meeting with you and thank the legislator for something they have done, such as:
  - Voting for or co-sponsoring the For The People Act
  - Running their campaign on issues you care about
  - The legislation they have sponsored
- **Meeting overview:** Tell them why you are meeting with them and what you hope to accomplish. If you are representing a particular group, tell them what the group does.
- **Introductions** - each attendee should briefly introduce themselves:
  - Name
  - Where you are from
  - The group or groups you volunteer with
  - Other information you think is important or relevant (but be brief!)
- Ask the staffer to introduce him/her/themselves: name, position on staff, responsibilities, why they decided to do this work.

- **Have your subject matter expert explain your concerns** and ask some initial questions about how the senator or representative feels about these issues and what they plan to do.
- **Ask a few constituents to tell their stories/concerns.**
- **Clearly state the “Ask”** and wait for their response.
  - E.g. “Can we count on your support for HR 1 For The People Act?”
- Listen carefully to their response. Follow-up on vague words or un-answered specifics.
  - If they are super supportive say “Thanks!” And ask “How can you influence others to also support this?” Ask “What can we do to help?”
  - If they say no, ask if there is additional information you can provide that would be helpful.
  - If they say “I will take this back to the member” ask “When can you let us know their position on this?”
- Repeat the “Ask” just to be clear and **summarize the needed follow-up.**
- No matter what happens, **thank them for taking the time to meet.** Don’t be afraid to chit-chat for a bit either. You probably have more in common than you think.

## After the Meeting

1. Debrief with the attendees after the meeting. What did we learn? How supportive is the member on our issue? What do we need to do for a follow-up? Who will do it?
2. Fill out the [report back form](#).
  - a. We recommend looking this over before the meeting so you know what to listen for in the meeting.
  - b. It’s super important for us to know what senators and representatives say to their constituents. When we meet with them here in DC we want to know what they said.
3. Send a **thank-you email** to the staff person you met with.
  - Make sure to reference specific points from the meeting.
  - Keep it short.
  - Include any materials you agreed to send, including the leave-behind document.
  - Include your simple ask, and ask if they need any other info from you.
4. Share what you learned with partners and congregants through conversations, posts, and newsletters

## Related Individual Actions

- [Action Alert Calls and Messages to U.S. Senators - For the People Act of 2021](#)
- [Action Alert](#) Messages to Both Chambers - [H.R.51/S.51](#), the Washington, D.C. Admission Act

## Supplemental Materials

### **Useful Resources from [Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice](#):**

- [Sample Message for Arranging a Meeting](#)
- [UUSJ Faith Letter in Support of HR1](#)
- [UUSJ Democracy Action Team webpage](#)
- [UUSJ UUs Mobilizing for the 2020 Elections](#)

### **Useful Resources from [Faithful Democracy](#):**

- [Congressional Meeting Leave Behind Document - For The People Act](#)
- [Congressional Meeting Talking Points Document - For the People Act](#)

### **Useful Resources from [Declaration for American Democracy](#):**

- [DFAD Democracy reform toolkit.](#)
- [DFAD Information on For The People Act](#)
- [DFAD Take Action Opportunities](#)
- [Sample activist intro/ reminder emails.](#)
- [DFAD We Demand Democracy one-pager.](#)