

How to Prepare & Organize Local Meetings With Policy Makers

Meet with your Governor or Mayor or County Executive; see their contact information at [governors link](#) and [mayors link](#) or [county executive link](#). Meet with your Members of Congress; see their contact information [here](#); federal calendars of in-district time can be found [here](#).

STEP 1. Learn about your Elected Officials

- Is your Governor or Mayor or County Executive engaged in welcoming refugees? Explore their websites to be aware of their knowledge, understanding, and commitment to refugees.
- Are your Members of Congress in Congressional leadership, or on the [Senate](#) or [House](#) Appropriations Committees; [Senate](#) or [House](#) Judiciary Committees; [Senate](#) or [House](#) Homeland Security Committees; or [Senate](#) or [House](#) Foreign Relations Committees? If so, they have jurisdiction over various aspects of the refugee program. Even if they aren't in leadership or on these committees, they can still be champions for refugees.
- What have your State, Local, and Federal officials said about refugees in the past? Has the member put out statements, authored op-eds, or been supportive of refugees? If they have, be sure to thank them and their staff. If they have a record of not supporting refugee resettlement, find out why. Have they cited reasons for not supporting the program? If so, prepare by more deeply understanding their concerns and build your talking points to address those concerns.
- What issues are of interest to them? Do they often speak out on certain issues? This can help you determine what approach to take when discussing refugees in your meeting. What did they do before they were elected to Congress? This can impact their perspective. It is your job as a successful advocate to discuss topics and frame issues in a way that will resonate with them.

STEP 2. Create an advocacy team: An ideal team consists of different stakeholder voices including refugees, case workers, faith leaders, business leaders, military veterans, and community leaders – all who can share in the planning, outreach, and coordination of visits and speak to the diversity of support for refugee resettlement.

STEP 3. Have a plan: Before the congressional visit, convene your advocacy team to assign roles:

- **The Facilitator:** This person starts the meeting, introduces the group, explains the purpose of the meeting, and provides time for each person to briefly introduce themselves and their organization and/or connection to refugees, to show that the group represents thousands of community members. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.
- **The Personal Story:** Storytelling is key to advocacy. A refugee should tell their story to show how people's lives are changed through refugee resettlement. Consider inviting a refugee who has been featured in a local news article, which can encourage policy makers to prioritize the meeting.

- The Community Support: Faith, business, employers, military, and community leaders briefly share how our refugees have contributed to the social, and economic fabric of their new community, and share concerns about negative policies.
- Specific Issue Points: It will be helpful to bring general [handouts](#), information on refugees [by state](#) and [stories of welcome by state](#). See the cover page of this toolkit for the [FAQ on Executive Order 13888](#), on State/Local Consent to Resettlement. See and adapt the [EO 13888 talking points](#).
- The Ask: The critical part when you make an ask, and wait for a response:
 - For State and Local Leaders: “Will you be a champion for refugees, declare your public support for refugees, formally consent (when the time comes) to refugee resettlement in your state, city, or county, oppose any and all anti-refugee proposals, and help us to enact pro-refugee policies?”
 - For Members of Congress: “Will you be a champion for refugees, hold the Administration accountable to meeting the annual resettlement goal, and returning to a goal of at least average annual historical norm of 95,000?” Ask them to co-sponsor and support the [GRACE Act](#) (S.1088/HR2146). *If they are a Representative, you can also urge them to join the Bipartisan Congressional Refugee Caucus.*

STEP 4. Debrief: It’s important to debrief as a team in a separate location following the meeting. As a group, ask: What did we hear and learn? Did we get what we wanted? How did we work together as a team? What are the next steps? How can we engage this policy maker in the future, perhaps through event invitations, etc.?

STEP 5. Follow-up: Always send a thank you email to the staff after the meeting. Reiterate the asks and send any information they asked for and any other information you think would be helpful. To maintain the relationship, you should invite the staff and/or the official to an upcoming event to meet with refugees.

STEP 6. Share: With USCCB/MRS/JFI National Advocacy Staff Matt Wilch, Refugee Policy Advisor, mwilch@usccb.org and Tony Cube, JFI National Manager, acube@usccb.org