

A photograph of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. The image shows the iconic white dome and the neoclassical facade of the building. In the foreground, there are vibrant red flowers, likely Canna lilies, adding a splash of color to the scene. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The word "Quorum" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font in the upper right corner.

Quorum

Eight Grassroots Strategies for Engaging with Congress

A note from Quorum's Co-founders

Launching grassroots advocacy campaigns can be daunting. That's why we built Quorum —to empower you and your advocates with modern technology to impact the issues you care about.

In this eBook, you'll find strategies shared with Quorum by those who know best what works and what doesn't in grassroots advocacy—the policymakers themselves. These elected officials have been approached by thousands of grassroots movements and will tell you what separates a great campaign from a good campaign.

Building a grassroots movement isn't easy, but we know our tips will help your organization create momentum and empower advocates to make an impact.

—Alex Wirth & Jonathan Marks

We went **Behind the Desk** with lawmakers to identify eight ways to get your issue **to their desk**.

1. Identify Bipartisan Champions
2. Work with Coalitions of Legislators
3. Personalize Form Emails
4. Start Conversations on Social Media
5. Attend & Participate in Officials' Events
6. Leverage District Offices
7. Localize Your Issue
8. Use Data to Tell Your Story



Quorum's Theresa Hebert interviewing Rep. DeSaulnier (D-CA-11) on tips for town halls.

1) Identify Bipartisan Champions

To start, it's important to identify legislators you want to champion your issue. Targeting specific legislators from both sides of the aisle builds stronger support in the long run.

One way to identify champions is to look to a legislator's background prior to being elected to Congress to find those with past experiences that connect them to your issue. Past experiences is one of the most salient characteristics legislators share across the aisle.

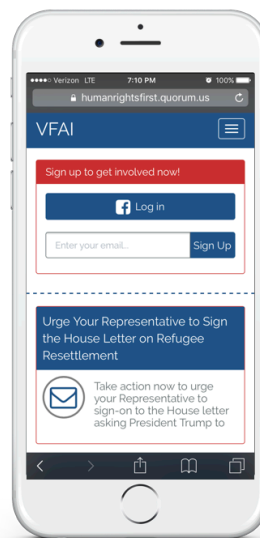
For example, Rep. Brian Mast (R-FL-18) served in the Army for over a decade before being elected to Congress. As the third most bipartisan Republican freshman, Mast has worked with colleagues with combat backgrounds on both sides of the aisle to create policies that improve the quality of life for veterans in the United States.

Instead of looking to the party you typically find success with or the members who will give you the easiest

signatures, find the members who believe in your cause and will push to make the legislation better, or whose background has commonalities with those affected by the proposed policies.

"If you can bring people from both sides of the aisle pushing in the same direction and rowing in the same direction, the likelihood of making progress is much greater."

—Rep. Brad Schneider
(D-IL-10)



Learn How Veterans for American Ideals Use Quorum Grassroots to Build Support in Congress

2) Work With Coalitions of Legislators

After you've identified your legislative champions, look to the coalitions they are a part of to expand awareness of your issue.

First, approach the committees your champions sit on to find additional legislators passionate and knowledgeable about your issue. These legislators are always looking for ways to connect their committee work back to their constituents and advocacy groups like yours can help showcase their impact.

For example, during the process of drafting the Farm Bill, Rep. Al Lawson (D-FL-5) brought committee members to his district to expand the network of SNAP champions—a great strategy for organizations to encourage and facilitate.

Caucuses also serve as a low-barrier opportunity to educate legislators with common interests or backgrounds without needing a piece of legislation on the table.



“We [the Congressional Black Caucus] are active on issues that impact the country as a whole and the world because several of us, myself included are on the Foreign Affairs Committee, other members are on Intel, Armed Services, you name it. We pretty much are on every committee in the House.”

—Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA-11) on how caucuses can be valuable in identifying champions across issues.

And if there isn't already a caucus aligned with your issue, find a champion willing to start one.

This approach was how the Congressional Maker Caucus came to be. Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA-41) was invited for a site visit to a makerspace in his district. The organization presented their ideas to Takano, he was convinced, and he returned to D.C. to share those ideas with his colleagues.

3) Personalize Your Form Emails

It doesn't matter which legislators or coalitions you target for support if your message isn't reaching them. Sending an email to a legislator is one of the easiest actions an advocate can take, and one of the most effective ways to get your message to a member's desk.

Emails from constituents to legislators generally fit in two buckets—form emails organized by an advocacy organization and personalized one-off emails sent from constituents. Form emails tend to be a popular way for advocacy organizations to encourage large groups of advocates to take action.

While many legislators have said they prefer personal messages to form emails, there are ways you can get the best of both worlds. If your organization is using a standard form email, incorporate a section for the advocate to customize with a personal story or message.

According to Rep. Ryan Costello (R-PA-16), form emails play an important role in weighing the importance of a given issue relative to other causes.



"I think the value of the form letter campaigns is we're able to identify our constituents who care about certain issues so that in the future if we may have something to say about that issue we know who to send it to."

—Rep. Costello (R-PA-16)

Limited time in a legislator's day contributes to the inability to read each and every message they receive, so it's important to find ways to stand out. For example, freshman Rep. John Faso (R-NY-19) was deluged with over 200,000 messages in his first 15 months in office.

"You get mass communications or mass email communications that are often organized by outside groups and it's the same form letter," Faso said. "You pay attention to those, but when you get the unique individual circumstance, obviously that catches your attention."

Read: [How Advocacy Organizations Use Quorum Outbox to Mobilize Support](#)

4) Start Conversations on Social Media

Social media offers grassroots campaigns a low-barrier way to mobilize supporters and engage stakeholders.

Elected officials are avid social media users, especially at the federal level. For example, Rep. Brendan Boyle (D-PA-13) shared with Quorum that he checks his Twitter and Facebook notifications on a near daily basis to respond to constituent inquiries and comments. Having your advocates tweet at their legislator or post on their Facebook page is a great way to amplify your message beyond the traditional avenues of advocacy.

The way you craft a message for social media should be unique to that platform, rather than simply copying the words you put in an email or share in a meeting with legislators. A post on Twitter or Facebook needs to grab the attention of a legislator and draw attention to the existence of your issue—consider using photos, infographics, or videos.

“Social media is not about press releases. It’s about engagement, it’s about having conversations,” Yuri Beckelman, Deputy Chief of Staff for

Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA-41), said. “They’ll be interested in having a conversation with you because they think there is a shared interest.”

By embracing all that social media has to offer, Takano has gained a new following of constituents who are aware of and interested in his work that he may not have captured otherwise. Your organization can find similar success by being deliberate in how you tailor your message for social media.



“One of the advantages [of social media] is that you can immediately reach someone in an important position directly in a very immediate way, so take advantage of those technologies.”

—Rep. Brendan Boyle (D-PA-13)

Read: [Six Ways to Engage with Members of Congress on Social Media](#)

5) Attend & Participate in Officials' Events

Digital communication will only take you so far. To keep your issue top-of-mind with a legislator, you need to follow up by meeting in-person.

Since 2017, legislators have noticed an increase in attendance at town halls and roundtables in their districts. One of the best ways to take advantage of these events is to use them as an opportunity to explain how potential legislation or lack thereof will impact your supporters and the community at large. Encourage advocates to frame their question or comment in the context of a personal narrative.

“They should be real and they should tell their authentic stories,” Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA-11) said. “I had a group of community college students come in here last week, very diverse, very articulate and they just said the cost of textbooks is too much. California has done all this great stuff at making community college more accessible so that we can get on track for a four year degree but this is what it costs us for textbooks, why is that...there’s an example of being very effective both in

the storytelling and being real but also having a specific ask.”

Whenever your organization is going to be present at an event, it is essential to come prepared. Ensure your advocates are well versed in the relevant policy area to ask knowledgeable questions.

A brief training session, online or in person, to prepare questions and practice their ask will empower your advocates, and maybe even make them more passionate about the issue.

“The three things are they should be real and they should tell their authentic stories and then they should do their homework.”

—Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA-11) on how to effectively use your time at a town hall.



[Read: How Quorum Helps Track Interactions Between Advocates and Legislators](#)

6) Use District Offices to Your Advantage

To build strong relationships with a legislator's office, utilize the district offices to get more face time with staffers and as a chance to discuss local projects.

Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL-13) has seen the ability to make change through the district office firsthand. Before being elected to Congress, Davis served as a district staffer for 16 years for Rep. John Shimkus (R-IL-15), so he has personal experience in the legislative work that a district office can help move forward. He advises advocacy groups to be strategic with where they focus their efforts.

"If you want to talk about projects, if you want to talk about different infrastructure investments, or water infrastructure, it's probably best to meet in the district so we can get a bird's eye view of the area you're talking about."

—Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL-13)



The most important relationship that one can have is with the district or state director, according to Brad Fitch, President & CEO of the Congressional Management Foundation.

"[The district or state director's] job is to, not just serve the member, but they have a customer service mentality," Fitch said. "So one of the first things you can do is try to build a relationship with the district director."

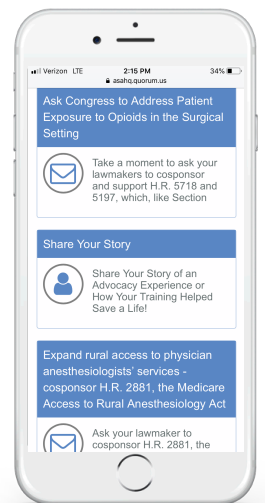
Your organization should be making its presence known at every state or district office of your champion legislators.

District offices not only allow your advocates to contribute without having

to travel far, they also offer

advocates more face-time with staffers—better positioning your organization when the time comes to ask for legislative support.

Learn How
American Society of
Anesthesiologists
Uses Quorum to
Grow Their
Grassroots Network



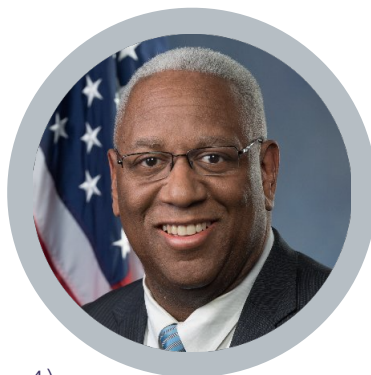
7) Localize Your Issue

As in real estate, location is instrumental in grassroots advocacy. Demonstrating to a lawmaker that your issue is having or will have a direct effect on their constituency is an important way to get them invested in your cause.

From town halls to fly-ins to roundtables, bringing constituents to your advocacy events will significantly bolster your issue in the eyes of lawmakers. Rep. Donald McEachin (D-VA-4) encourages organizations with large networks of supporters to mobilize constituents on a local level as much as possible.

“While you may have an umbrella organization that is based here in DC that coordinates things, make sure you bring constituents to the offices...When you hear a familiar city or even a familiar name from a particularly active constituent, that helps resonate with the congressman or congresswoman.”

-Rep. Donald McEachin (D-VA-4)



By taking a local approach, legislators can show voters why they are spending time on a specific cause. Rep. Costello is consistently trying to localize issues to show his constituents why he is voting a certain way that hits close to home.

“People see us as these creatures of Washington,” Costello said. “The more we can sort of step outside out of that caricature into [that of] the local member doing local things listening to local concerns trying to respond in a way that makes a local impact, that is why most of us ran for office in the first instance, so you taking something and localizing it is actually helping us do what we want to do anyway.”

By localizing your issue, you remind lawmakers that your issue is important to their most important stakeholders, their constituents.

Read:
[How Quorum Grassroots Can Help You Organize Your Database of Advocates](#)

8) Use Data to Tell Your Story

Using data to tell your organization's story and demonstrate economic impact in a district is a critical way to prove the importance of your issue and create urgency for a legislator.

Data can visualize your organization's impact without needing pages and pages of anecdotes or explanations. Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL-13) warns against leaving thick folders with dense reading, as the office likely won't have time to review packets of information.

"Be concise. I joke around for some members [the key to a good leave-behind is] to put big pictures on it."

—Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL-13)

"A lot of folks want to come in and talk about just pieces of legislation but if there are issues or projects in your district, give a rundown of what they are.



If you're coming in here with a folder full of stuff, the likelihood of someone actually going through that folder later is pretty unlikely," Davis said.

Polling data is another way of using numbers to highlight your issue. Polling data can be especially effective if one anticipates that a legislator agrees with an advocacy group's position, but is not vocal about their leanings for fear of party politics. Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-NY-13) has called on advocates to leverage this technique in the DACA debate.

"I think [advocates] need to focus and concentrate on convincing those members that may want to do it on the other side of the aisle but still are a 'no'," Espaillat said.

Take advantage of the opportunity to leave-behind materials that articulate your message and illustrate the statistical impact of your issue. An effective, data-driven leave-behind will keep your issue on the mind of a legislator long after your meeting.

[Read: How Your Organization Can Map Custom Data in Quorum](#)

Quorum Grassroots



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