



Advocate's Guide to Grassroots Organizing During a Congressional Recess

Members of Congress head home for in-district work periods—commonly referred to as, recess—approximately nine times per every session of Congress. A typical recess lasts one-two weeks, however the August in-district work period usually lasts for the entire month.

In-district work periods provide an excellent opportunity for advocates to organize and speak out through a number of outlets. Whether setting up in-district meetings, organizing press events, or circulating sign-on letters, activists can call attention to an issue and send a message to their members of Congress.

Events and Activities

➤ *Organize a Press Event*

A press event should include local and national leaders from a wide variety of organizations and who can voice support for your issue. It may also be useful to have materials available to pass out to the audience.

➤ *Request an In-District Meeting*

Call the scheduler in the primary state office of the member of Congress and ask for a brief meeting to discuss your issue's policy and priorities. Be sure to prepare a brief agenda, allow the member of Congress to express her/his ideas, and don't leave without extracting some specific policy commitment from her/him.

➤ *Conduct an Issue Forum*

Organizing a forum and inviting experts and community leaders to the table is an excellent way to bring an issue to the forefront. Keep in mind, however, that a forum should educate the public, not serve as a political platform.

➤ *Attend Town Hall Meetings*

Many members of Congress arrange town hall meetings during the recess period. It is important, especially since such information is not often readily available to the public, to find out from their office when and where these meetings will take place. It may also be useful to pull together materials for the member of Congress and her/his staff

➤ *Organize and/or Attend Public Rallies*

A public demonstration is a useful tool when trying to draw immediate public attention to an issue, and turnout may even attract local media coverage.

Products

➤ *Encourage Constituent Calls and E-mails*

Members of Congress are often responsive to voter opinion, especially before she/he returns to the state to meet with constituents. Calling and e-mailing a member of



Congress before recess or while in town can create the impression that there are mounting objections to a member of Congress' stance on a particular issue.

➤ *Circulate a Sign-On Letter*

A sign-on letter with signatures from prominent leaders, as well as a clear outline of your position on an issue, can attract valuable attention. Distributing it at public events, as well as delivering it in person to the state office, is recommended.

Media

➤ *Call into Local Radio Programs*

Often, members of Congress appear on local radio programs and take questions from the community. Placing a call would provide a great opportunity to engage the member of Congress in a particular issue, as well as airing the issue for the public. During other times of the year, it is also important to utilize local political call-in shows as a venue to broadcast and discuss your particular issue.

➤ *Draft Op-Ed's and Letters to the Editor*

Submitting letters to local newspapers and having them go to print can prove very valuable in publicizing your issue to a wide audience. It can also function as a useful resource for activists and rallying tool for organizers.