



# TOOLKIT: LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

**AUGUST 2024**

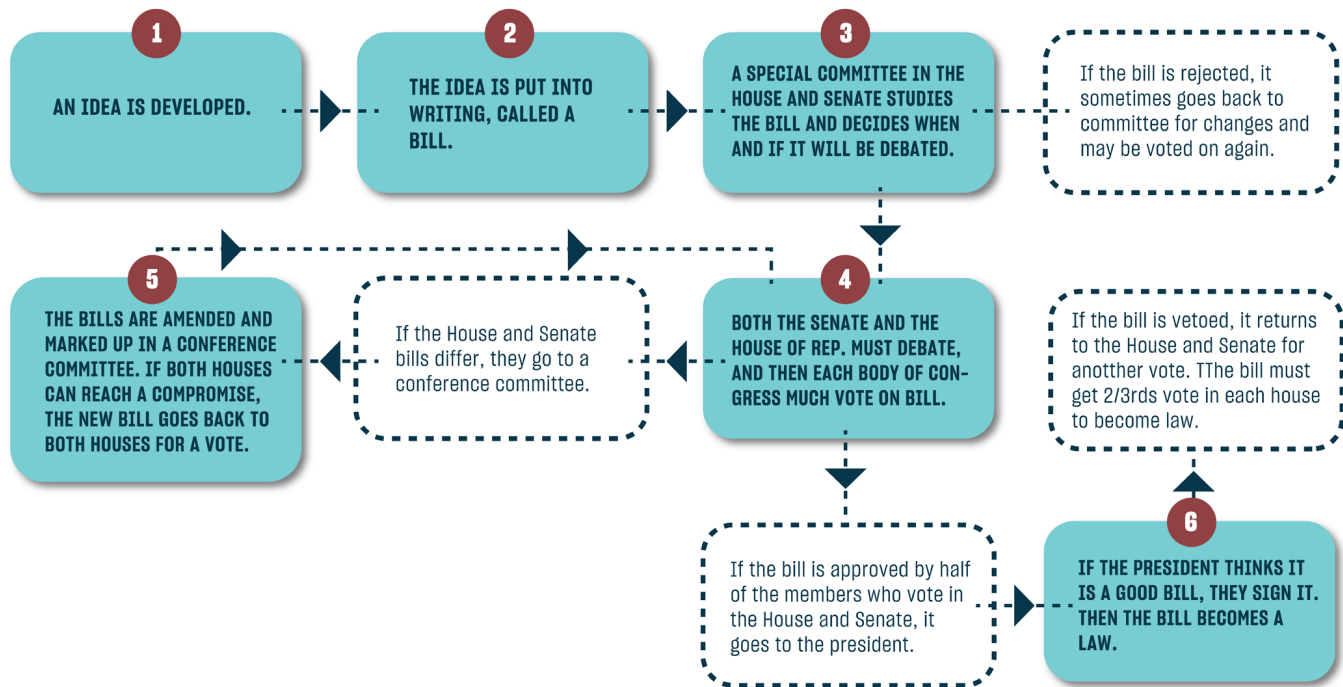


## WHAT IS LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY?

Legislative advocacy is building support for an issue or cause that you believe in through engaging legislators and advocating for or against certain legislation, or proposed laws. Anyone can participate in the legislative process this way and it is a great way to get your voice heard. The aim of legislative advocacy, also known as lobbying, is to influence the outcome of a legislator's vote on a proposed legislation or a bill. This type of advocacy can also be for the purpose of building a legislative champion and public voice on the issue you care about. This advocacy can take the form of a letter, a phone or video call, or an in-person meeting. Face-to-face meetings (or video calls if necessary) with legislators, or their staff, in their district or Washington, D.C. offices (if they are in the US Congress), Austin (if they are Texas state legislators) or Sacramento (if they are California state legislators) are the most effective way to influence them and will be the focus of this toolkit.

Before we begin, it is important that we understand the legislative process to understand where and when lobbying fits into all of this. While it is different in every state, the basic structure of the process is similar nationwide. The visual below displays an example bill from the US Congress as it goes through the legislative process. A similar process occurs with state bills in California and Texas.

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### **WHY DO WE MEET WITH LEGISLATORS?**

- **EDUCATE:** Among the main goals of meeting with a legislator are to educate them on the issues that are important to you, give them reliable information on the issues and open their eyes to how the legislation at issue impacts your community.
- **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS:** Developing a relationship with your elected official and/or their staff can be a powerful tool to have your voice heard. If you are unable to meet in person with your elected official or legislator, meet with their staff. The staff are employed by the legislator to work on legislation, regulatory issues, and policy every day and greatly influence their bosses' positions and votes. When in person meetings are not possible, you can also meet by video conference or conference call.
- **GET THEIR VOTE:** When you meet with legislators, there is usually an “ask,” such as asking them to vote in favor or against a bill. You should adjust your ask depending on what you already know about the legislator’s position on similar issues. For example, if they are already in agreement with your position, you

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may ask them to cosponsor the legislation rather than just asking them to vote in favor of it.

- **NEUTRALIZE:** Certain legislators are unlikely to support your position. Rather than urging them to change their firm position on an issue, informative meetings with these more difficult legislators can help moderate their opposition to a bill you support. Neutralizing is an important strategy as it can prevent the legislator from being as vocal about their opposition and/or going to other legislators to persuade them to vote against your position.
- **BUILDING CHAMPIONS:** Meeting with legislators is also a way to build a public and powerful champion for the issue you care about. A champion can make supportive public statements, influence other legislators and policy makers, and in some cases work with you to develop new and creative legislative proposals.

## **WHO CAN LOBBY?**

Anyone who is willing to learn can lobby! Importantly, lobbying is a way that immigrants can participate in the legislative process and have their voice heard with regard to the immigration policies that affect their lives. While legislators may be most responsive to voting constituents, immigrants can be a powerful voice for legislators to understand the real impact of immigration policies.

**TIP:** IT IS HELPFUL TO CREATE LOBBY PACKETS FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY BE NEWER TO LOBBYING OR THE ISSUE YOU ARE WORKING ON TOGETHER. THESE PACKETS CAN INCLUDE SAMPLE MEETING REQUESTS, SAMPLE MEETING AGENDAS, SAMPLE INTERNAL FAQs AND TALKING POINTS, AND ARTICLES AND ONE-PAGERS TO SHARE WITH THE OFFICE.

### ► WHAT IF I'M UNDOCUMENTED?

⇒ For undocumented immigrants, know that Senators and Representatives'

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state/in-district offices often are housed in federal office buildings for which you need a valid U.S. form of identification to enter. However, you do not need identification to enter the House and Senate offices in Washington, D.C. For state offices, it can vary by district. Call the building's clerk about what type of identification is required to enter. If identification is required, you can ask to join the meeting virtually or via conference call.

► WHAT IF I DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH?

- ⇒ If you are going to meet with a legislator, ask if their office will be able to provide an interpreter when your group sets up the meeting. Some offices can provide interpreters so be sure to ask if it will be difficult for you to acquire your own. If the legislator's office is unable to provide one, you may bring your own interpreter. If you are affiliated with an organization, they may be able to assist you.
- ⇒ Sign language interpreters are available for all constituent meetings in federal buildings under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

## BEFORE THE MEETING

### WHO IS MY LEGISLATOR?

First, you need to determine who you are meeting with. To find your state legislator in California, you can go to: <https://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov/>. If you live in Texas, go to [www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us](http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us). Other states have similar tools. To find your U.S. Representative and Senators, go to <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>. While legislators are more responsive to constituents, you can also meet with legislators from different districts.



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## **WHERE WILL I MEET THEM?**

### *U.S. Representatives & Senators:*

- ▶ **IN-DISTRICT:** In-district visits occur in your legislators' own state, in their district office. These offices tend to be less busy than their Washington D.C. office so this is a great way to speak with your legislator without having to travel a large distance. To meet with your legislator in-district, you will likely need to schedule a meeting when Congress is not in session. To find out when Congress is session (for the House and the Senate), go to: <https://www.congress.gov/days-in-session>. At other times, you can meet with the legislator's in-district staff.
- ▶ **D.C. OFFICE:** If you schedule a meeting with your legislator while Congress is in session, you will likely be meeting with them in their Washington D.C. office.
- ▶ **REMOTE:** While in-person meetings remain the most effective way to share your position with a legislator, video conferences are an increasingly common method of communication and may be suggested by the legislator's scheduler.

### *State elected officials:*

- ▶ **California and Texas:** Schedule meetings with state representatives and senators by contacting their aide or scheduler. This information is typically available on their website under "staff." Meetings can take place either in the capital, in district or by video-conference.

## **GETTING A MEETING**

Depending on your legislator, they may have different preferences for how to contact them and set up a meeting—calling, emailing, and sending a letter are all options.

### **CALLING**

*For U.S. Senators & Representatives:* Call your legislator's Washington D.C. office

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even if you want to meet in-district because their scheduler is usually based in D.C. You can do this by calling the general Congressional Switchboard number at 202-224-3121 and asking to be connected to your Senator or Representative's office.



- ▶ After you are connected to that office, ask to speak to the scheduler.
- ▶ Once connected to the scheduler, request an appointment with the Senator or Representative you are calling. In some cases, the D.C. scheduler will ask you to call the state/district office to make the appointment.
- ▶ When you speak to the scheduler to request a meeting, note who you are and who you represent, the purpose of the meeting (the specific bill or proposed legislation), when you would want the meeting (be flexible), and who will be attending.
  - ⇒ If you are speaking to the scheduler, and not the staffer who covers immigration, ask for the name and contact information of the immigration staffer. If there is no specific

**TIP:** WHAT IF THEY TELL YOU THE MEMBER OF CONGRESS'S SCHEDULE IS FULL OR CANNOT MEET WITH YOU FOR SOME REASON? REITERATE YOUR REQUEST TO MEET WITH A REPRESENTATIVE FROM THAT OFFICE, SPECIFICALLY SOMEONE WHO HAS KNOWLEDGE OF THE ISSUE FOR WHICH YOU ARE CALLING. THE SCHEDULER MIGHT THEN SUGGEST YOU TALK WITH THE STAFFER WHO COVERS IMMIGRATION, THIS IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STAFFER WHO COVERS IMMIGRATION—STAFFER MEETINGS ARE ALSO IMPORTANT AS STAFFERS ELECTED OFFICIALS' POSITIONS ON ISSUES.

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immigration staffer, ask to speak with the staffer that works on related policies.

*For State Legislators:*

- ▶ You'll need to know which district you live in and the name of the legislator you're trying to contact. State the reason why you would like to meet with the legislator or their staff, such as the bill number that you would like to discuss and whether you are asking for support or opposition of a bill. They may ask for your home address and zip code to verify that you live in the district.

### **EMAILING & LETTERS**

Some offices may ask you to send your request for a meeting in writing, either in a letter or via email. If that is the case, get the name of the person who requested that you send the letter, send the letter promptly and follow up with a phone call.

### **DO YOUR HOMEWORK!**

Research the elected officials with whom you are meeting so you know their positions on relevant issues.

- ▶ Read about the official you are meeting with including biographies of elected officials and/or their staff. Visit their website/social media to see what type of message they are trying to get across.
- ▶ If it is a key meeting, try to include attendees who will speak to the issues the legislator cares most about, for example faith allies or domestic violence groups, as applicable.
- ▶ Check their voting record on similar issues or bills. It is helpful to also flag if other legislators support the issue, if their caucus is supporting the issue, or if leaders in their party support the issue.
- ▶ See who donated to their campaign: Whose interests are they protecting?

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Use this information when deciding how to frame your message. You can see your legislators' major donors at: <https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/members-list> for US Congress members or <https://www.followthemoney.org> for state legislators.

- ▶ If possible, prepare a packet of materials to give to your elected official that supports your position. These materials could include background information, fact sheets, and/or newspaper clippings and should be no more than 10 pages.
  - ⇒ Attach your card or contact information to the packet. Like most people, legislators are more likely to remember examples conveyed in human and personal terms.
  - ⇒ To encourage legislators to support a specific immigration issue, present materials that clearly articulate your position, using specific examples when possible.

### ***BRING FRIENDS AND PARTNERS***

Assign roles to each person who will be participating, this will help you stay organized and harmonious. Try to limit the group to 4-5 people—smaller meetings tend to be more effective.

#### *Tips for a group legislative meeting*

- ▶ Make sure everyone in your group is prepared. Brief everyone attending the meeting and make sure they have any written materials (biographical profile of legislators and their views, etc.) to review well ahead of time.
- ▶ Be organized. Determine before the meeting each participant's role, who will discuss what, and in what order participants will speak.

### ***WHAT DO I SAY?***

*How can you best talk about an issue that conveys what you want to say in a strong,*



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*clear and convincing way?*

- ▶ Talking points help you to do just that: they frame an issue in the simplest and strongest way and help you effectively make your point and keep you focused during your meeting.
- ▶ The answers to the following questions will help you to determine how best to talk about an issue.
  - ⇒ What is your goal?
  - ⇒ Who is your audience?
  - ⇒ Why does your audience care about this issue?

After answering the questions above, it is important to think through what you want to say and how you want to say it. To do that, first determine what your major theme is and then the 3 to 5 main points that express this theme. While a general theme is helpful in expressing your values, remain precise and specific in the issues you discuss. Do not overwhelm the legislator by talking about how the entire immigration system is broken and needs to be fixed, for example. While that is true, focusing on the specific ask or bill in question helps to frame your ask as a discrete, manageable task. Further, it is best to keep a local focus. Legislators are likely meeting with you because you are a constituent, so relate the issue and position to the local community.

***ILLUSTRATE THE PROBLEM WITH A STORY: A POWERFUL TOOL IN LOBBYING IS SHOWING A LEGISLATOR HOW THEIR POLICIES AFFECT REAL PEOPLE. IF YOU CHOOSE TO, YOU CAN TELL A PERSONAL STORY OR HAVE SOMEONE IN YOUR GROUP TELL A STORY IF THEY CHOOSE, ABOUT HOW THEY WOULD BE/HAVE BEEN IMPACTED BY THE POLICY MEASURE IN QUESTION.***

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**Flexibility:** Points can change! Remember that you may need to change your talking points or the order in which you use them because things and/or your audience change. Your conversation will likely not follow the exact order of your agenda. Legislators are often busy, and interruptions are common, so be prepared to customize your talking points to meet these changed circumstances. Having a short set of remarks at the ready will enable you to still get the main issues across in a clear way even if your time is cut short.

**Difficult questions:** Despite the expertise of your delegation and your preparations, you might be asked questions that are awkward or that you are unable to answer on the spot. In that case, communicate that you will look into the question and get back to them. Make sure you follow up with them after you have had time to find out the answer.

## **AGENDA**

Meetings are typically 30–45 minutes. The general [structure of an agenda](#) should look like:

- 1.** Introductions
  - a.** Thank member/staff for the meeting
  - b.** Share the purpose of the meeting
  - c.** Start introductions of attendees (name, organization, pronouns). State connection to the elected official, especially if constituent.
- 2.** Review the issue, summarize the potential legislation if applicable.
  - a.** Background
  - b.** Problem: Provide impacted stories.
  - c.** Solution

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- d. Who else supports?  
Share support from relevant groups.
- 3. Ask what the outstanding questions are. Respond to questions.
- 4. Make the Ask!
- 5. Summarize next steps
- 6. Thank you!

## DURING THE MEETING

- Be early and dress professionally, if possible.
- Begin by introducing yourselves and explain to the legislator/staffer why you asked for the meeting.
- Confirm how long the meeting will be and adjust your presentation if you find out that you will have more or less time than you were told originally.
- Present your concerns simply and directly. Get to your main points immediately. Be brief, direct, courteous, and positive. When

**TIPS:** REMEMBER NOT TO DO ALL OF THE TALKING. MAKE SURE YOU GIVE THE LEGISLATORS THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS OR STATE THEIR OPINIONS. ASK THEM QUESTIONS.

DO NOT ARGUE WITH THE LEGISLATOR OR STAFF MEMBERS. IF YOU DISAGREE, MAKE YOUR POINT AND MOVE ON.

IF YOU DO NOT KNOW THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION, SAY SO, AND PROMISE TO GET BACK WITH THE ANSWER. BE SURE TO FOLLOW UP WITH YOUR ANSWER AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE AFTER THE MEETING.

DON'T USE JARGON. IMMIGRATION LAW IS FULL OF JARGON AND ACRONYMS AND MOST LEGISLATORS DO NOT KNOW IT. USE ACCESSIBLE WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE ISSUE. EX: DON'T SAY TPS, SAY TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS. YOU CAN ALSO USE OTHER RESOURCES LIKE VISUALS AND INFOGRAPHICS TO HELP EXPLAIN ISSUES.

SAY THANK YOU! MENTION SPECIFIC WAYS THEY MADE YOU FEEL HEARD. IF THEY WEREN'T A VERY OPEN AUDIENCE, STILL THANK THEM FOR THEIR TIME AND TRY TO END THE MEETING ON A POSITIVE NOTE.



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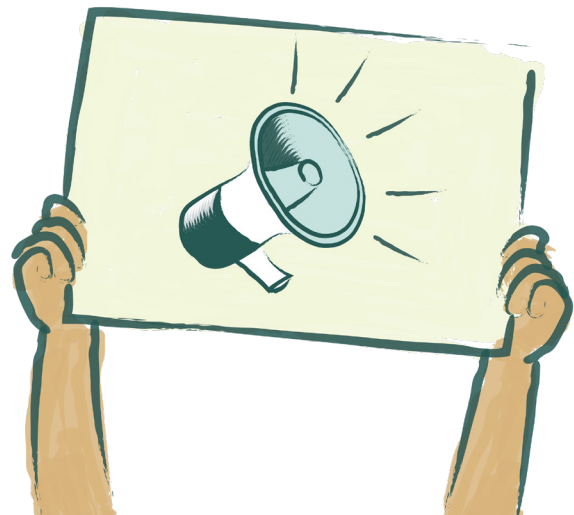
presenting each issue, do not assume that your legislator has any prior knowledge, especially because there are many misunderstandings about immigration law and policy. After your brief explanation of the issue, don't forget to explain how the issue directly affects you, your community, or the group you represent.

- **Make the ask:** Indicate what you would like your legislator to do. If you want your elected officials to support a specific issue, explain how your community has been impacted, and the consequences in concrete terms. Finally, ask your legislator to support legislation that would authorize the reform you support. If the office declines to support at that moment, ask if you can give them any more information or answer any more questions to try and resolve the barriers that keep them from supporting.

## AFTER THE MEETING

### **FOLLOWING UP:**

- Send a note thanking the legislator or staffer for meeting with you. Briefly summarize the main points of the meeting.
- Remember to follow up with responses to any questions the legislator or staff asked but you could not answer at the time or materials they requested.
- Report back to your organization, if applicable. Reporting back can help organizations developing legislative strategies and tracking Members' positions on issues important to the pro-immigrant community. It is often helpful to create a tracking document or spreadsheet that can be used to assign legislative visits and capture report backs.



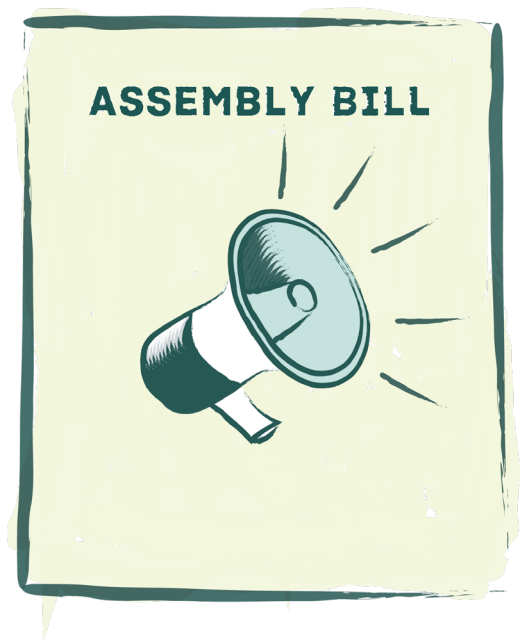
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## STAY ENGAGED:

- Do not think of the meeting as an isolated event. Although you may not have a face-to-face meeting again for some time, invite your elected officials to speak at an event or meeting. Think of other ways to maintain the relationship you have initiated.

## CONCLUSION

It is crucial that policymakers hear the voices of those impacted by immigration policies. Legislative meetings are a powerful way to educate legislators and motivate them to enact meaningful immigration reform and protections. The aim of this toolkit is to share the message that anyone can lobby and to break down the steps to take to start meeting with legislators. We hope you feel empowered to participate in the legislative process and to be creative in your advocacy, as this toolkit is just a starting point of what you can accomplish. If you have questions, visit [ilrc.org](http://ilrc.org).



## SOURCES

This toolkit updates ILRC's [Congressional and Media Advocacy Guide](#). We looked at the legislative toolkits of many of our partners when creating this update and appreciate the depth of work being done by them to make the legislative process accessible and effective. The sources we consulted in creating this update include:

- [ACLU NorCal Legislative Toolkit](#)
- [Advocates for Human Rights: Advocacy](#)



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- [Amnesty International Campaigning Manual](#)
- [California State Assembly How to Lobby the California State Legislature](#)
- [Friends Committee on National Legislation How to Lobby Virtually: A Step-by-Step Guide](#)
- [NETWORK Lobby with NETWORK](#)
- [NRDC How to Lobby Your Legislator](#)
- [Texas CASA Legislative Advocacy Guide](#)

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