



Tips for meeting with your Members of Congress online or via conference call

Perhaps the most effective way to meet with an elected official is as a small group of people with a common concern and different experiences and perspectives. For example, if you are advocating for refugee resettlement and integration, consider including in your group: a former refugee, an employer of refugees, a teacher or volunteer who has worked with refugees. During COVID-19, Legislators and their staffers have gotten used to conducting meetings with their constituents through an online format or in a conference call. These meetings require a little more preparation but can be just as effective as in-person. Here are some helpful tips for how to set up & conduct an online visit with your Member of Congress or other Elected Official. Please refer to [Holy Discontentment](#) for additional guidance on meeting or writing your elected officials.

Scheduling an online meeting or conference call

When requesting a meeting, you can inquire about this possibility of meeting by phone or an on-line platform, such as Zoom. Some offices prefer to set up the call or online meeting so that they can control the security/access. In other cases, they are happy to have you set it up. Either way, they will tell you the information they need about who is attending the meeting, such as name, whether or not a constituent, your zip code. You should also ask the staff person about how much time you can expect to have with the legislator or aid.

Before the Meeting

If you are setting up the Zoom or Conference Call – Do not use a public forum such as Facebook to share the log-in information or phone number. This will help prevent uninvited guests into your meeting. And be sure to have others in your group register with you so you have all the necessary information, and you are able to limit who is on the call. Take advantage of the various security settings.

In addition to the normal preparation for a meeting, it is helpful to have one person serve as the facilitator for your group. Work out a clear speaking order so you can move quickly from one person to the next and not speak over each other. You may want to identify the topics or key talking points that each person will address in determining the order and who can answer questions that may come up from the legislator or aid. Conference calls need even more facilitation to keep people from talking over one another.

Consider any handouts you would want to share so you can collect them in one folder, perhaps scan in any stories or photos. Do you have a written document about the legislation or policy recommendations? Email any handouts you have for the legislator right before the meeting starts or as it is beginning.

During the Meeting

Here's a good way to structure your meeting:

- **Who you are:** Have everyone in your group briefly introduce themselves, emphasizing the constituency they represent (i.e. how your group is familiar with the experiences of refugees or asylum seekers): organization, community group, congregation, etc.
- **Why you care:** Share your story and how inhumane treatment is harmful and/or positive experiences that serve as a model.
- **What you want:** “We want Congress to . . . and we ask you to . . .” Try to put your ask into one or two sentences. Be as specific as possible.
- **Reference the Leave Behinds:** Note the documents that have sent or will send by email to support your request.

The facilitator should introduce the group and explain the agenda, as well as how you want to handle discussion. (Be sure to give the legislator or aid time to respond.) If meeting via Zoom, you can also share links in the chat to relevant websites/resources.

After the meeting: Debrief on the conference/zoom call once the legislator and congressional staff has left the meeting and ONLY if it's your own zoom line - or set up a call as soon as possible as a group. What did you hear and learn? Send a thank you email reiterating the asks and answering any questions. Did you promise to research something or send a particular report to support your ask? If so, be sure to include these in your follow-up email.