

During an extended recess, Members of Congress typically host many public events in their districts or states. They use these platforms to update constituents on various policy issues facing Congress, and hear from voters about their communities' priorities.

In order to make ending homelessness a priority for Congress, it is important to take advantage of these opportunities to have your voice heard by planning your advocacy, and building a team within your community to help maximize your voice. Here are some tips for building a successful advocacy effort during the extended recess.

HOW TO ENGAGE MEMBERS DURING RECESS

Step One: Find out where your Members of Congress will be during recess

It is important to know what your Members of Congress have scheduled in order to engage them. There are a number of ways to follow the activities of your representatives while they are in your state and district during a recess, including:

- ❑ **Find and follow members of congress on social media.** Nearly every Member of Congress has an official account on major social media platforms, and they often use those accounts to announce public events. [Enter your address on our Advocacy website](#), find your Members' social media accounts, and follow them to get the latest news on the events they are holding.
- ❑ **Ask their district office.** [Enter your address on our Advocacy website](#) to find contact information for your representatives' district office and ask them about events that are coming up in your area. Ask if they are open to the public, or how you can attend.
- ❑ **Keep up with local media.** Most Members will announce their events ahead of time. Check your local media outlets regularly to see if there are any upcoming events in your area.

Step Two: Reach out personally

This extended recess is a perfect opportunity for you to make more direct contact with your elected officials. Consider personal communications, including:

- ❑ **Invite your Members of Congress to tour your organization.** Site Visits are an important way to show your representatives firsthand the impact of federal funding by showing them the important work your organization does. Use [this invitation template](#) to ask your Members to visit your program. If you are able to schedule a site visit and need additional help, feel free to reach out to [Julie Klein](#) and [Jared Thompson](#) for further assistance.

- **Set up a one-on-one meeting with your Member or their staff.** Individual meetings are a great way to communicate directly with your representatives and in a more private way. Call your Members' district office to find out the best way to schedule a one-on-one meeting to talk about your program and the importance of funding the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants.

If you are unable to get a meeting with your Member, ask if you can meet with the staff in the district office. Give the office an update on your program's work, and emphasize this point:

In order to build on the progress we have made towards ending homelessness in our community, it is essential to provide at least \$2.6 billion for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program in FY 2018. Will you communicate this to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and to congressional leadership?

- **Call and email your Members of Congress.** Even when Congress is in recess, it is important to keep in contact with your representatives and their staff, both in the district and DC offices. [Use our tools](#) to reach out to your Members of Congress. To contact their district offices, [call the general number](#) for the local office.

Step Three: Amplify your voice

Organize a community effort to communicate the importance of ending homelessness to your Members of Congress. Your network can help amplify your voice and efforts. Here are a few ways to build that response:

- **Include other stakeholders your Members of Congress may be interested in hearing from if you plan on meeting with your Members in any way.** This can be elected officials such as mayors or city council members, or other influential members of the community like business leaders, nonprofit partners, or faith leaders.

Ask these local leaders to send a [letter of support](#) to encourage your Member to attend a site visit, and ask if they will join you for the site visit or for a private meeting. Not only will their involvement make it more likely that the Member will attend the meeting, but strong support from across the community will also make it more likely that the Member will pay close attention to your priorities.

- **Reach out to your local newspapers** and ask if you can submit an Op-Ed in advance of a public event with your Member to raise public awareness of the importance of homelessness funding to your community.
- **Organize a group of local advocates** and organizations to attend a Town Hall or public event with you to increase the chance that your priorities are heard.
- **Organize a local "Call-In" or "Write-In" day** where local advocates and partners write or call your Members of Congress together.

Step Four: Attend a Town Hall Meeting

Town Halls allow you to put the issue of homelessness on your Members of Congress' radars by sharing your concerns. Unlike most other advocacy opportunities, these events also provide a great platform for getting Members to publicly commit to doing something to help end homelessness. To prepare for a Town Hall:

- **Find out when the town hall will be.** Call your Members' district offices, visit their websites and check local media to determine if they will host a Town Hall. If you are unable to find information from the Member's office, you can also check townhallproject.com.
- **Spread the word.** Let your colleagues and networks know the locations and times of these events. Ask them to join you to show that a large number of constituents care about this issue.
- **At the event, raise the issue of homelessness.** Briefly provide some context on the nature and extent of homelessness in your district or state. Explain the importance of local homeless assistance programs funded by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program. Explain that in order to replicate the progress we have made ending veteran homelessness with families and other populations, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program will need at least \$2.6 billion total in FY 2018.
- **Ask your Member for support.** Ask your Member of Congress: "In order to end homelessness, will you communicate the message that 'providing at least \$2.6 billion for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program in FY 2018 is essential' to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and congressional leadership?"
*The above question is THE most timely and important question you can ask - **if you can only say one thing, this should be it!** Try to get Members to publicly commit to working with their colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to ensure that this funding level for McKinney is a top priority when FY 2018 funding legislation is finalized.*
- **Ask other questions.** See a couple of examples below.
 - Permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing have proven to be effective, cost-efficient solutions to homelessness. What is your plan to ensure that enough units are funded?
 - If given the opportunity, will you circulate or sign on to Dear Colleague letters in support of increased funding for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program in future fiscal years?

If you need help with any of these efforts or have any questions, reach out to [Julie Klein](#) and [Jared Thompson](#) for support from the Alliance.