

Congressionally directed funding (CDF), formerly known as earmarks, can benefit governmental or non-profit entities. These funds are explicitly written in and set aside in a bill, defining where, how much, and for what purpose funding is to be used.

These funding decisions can have a significant impact on homelessness. Here's how advocates can make their case to Congress.

What makes a good earmark request?

1. **Timeliness** — funds can be spent in one or two fiscal years
2. **Sustainability** — the project won't collapse when the earmark funding runs out
3. **No other recourse** — as an example, if a city has a same shelter addition in its budget as in a CDF request, it is not helpful unless the CDF is necessary to finish the shelter
4. **Attention to equity** — projects that assist underserved areas or populations are often preferred
5. **Community support** — for example, some offices insist on two letters from local elected officials
6. **No conflicts** — no federal, state, or local legal or regulatory conflicts

Best practices for advocates to consider in pursuit of an earmark:

1. Do your homework: what are your lawmakers' records? Check their websites, as well as the websites for the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. Did they request housing and homelessness earmarks comparable to what you're seeking, no housing and homelessness earmarks, or no earmarks at all?
2. Lawmakers who serve on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees are more likely to get their earmarks included, but any lawmaker can seek an earmark. You can still advocate for an earmark even if your lawmaker is not on an Appropriations Committee.
3. Don't worry about appearing greedy — you can ask different lawmakers for the same CDF.
4. Assign a point person in your organization for CDF: someone who can drop everything and provide help to harried Congressional staff when appropriations season gets extremely busy.
5. Be flexible on the money and purposes for your earmark.
6. Ask your lawmakers about earmarks for the following fiscal year sooner rather than later.
7. Remember that lawmakers prioritize their CDF requests. Be closer to the top of their lists than the bottom, knowing that not all of their requests will be approved!
8. Don't assume you'll get the earmark, or base your budget on that assumption.