



Congressional Advocacy Tool Kit

An Informational Guide for Conducting Educational Meetings
with Members of the US Congress and State Legislators



September 2015



In Our Own Voice: The National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda (In Our Own Voice) is a policy initiative that brings together five strategic partners; Black Women for Wellness, Black Women's Health Imperative, New Voices Pittsburgh, SisterLove, Inc. and SPARK Reproductive Justice Now, to form a collective voice advocating for the human rights of all women to control our bodies, our sexuality, our gender, our work and our reproduction. As such, our focus is on abortion rights and access, contraceptive equity and comprehensive sex education as our key policy issues.

Objectives- *In Our Own Voice: The National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda:*

- Develop a national Reproductive Justice strategy to proactively protect the abortion rights of Black women, regardless of economic status;
- Coordinate and support state-based Reproductive Justice fights on abortion rights and contraceptive access, especially where Black women are targeted;
- Galvanize Black women across the country in support of Reproductive Justice, including, but not limited to the reproductive health issues of abortion rights, contraceptive access and comprehensive sex education; and
- Put a national public face on the Reproductive Justice policy and advocacy efforts of Black women.

To learn more about *In Our Own Voice: The National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda* and the partner agencies, visit our website at www.BlackRJ.org.

Introduction

This toolkit is intended for use by the *In Our Own Voice* strategic partners and their staff to assist in advocacy, policy development and implementation and community engagement. It is intended to be used by persons with all levels of policy experience.

An effective advocacy effort must include many partners and take many forms. This toolkit will assist you in improving and forming a cohesive advocacy strategy and coalition in your state and will lay out the many advocacy efforts that can be utilized at the local, state and national levels. We hope that you will find this toolkit useful.

Advocacy

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is targeted action directed at changing the policies, positions or programs at any type of institution, at any level, and encompasses a broad range of activities. Effective advocacy can:

- Educate leaders, policymakers or administrators who implement policies
- Alter existing policies, laws and budgets
- Develop new programs
- Create more open dialogue with decision-makers



Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Although most people use the words advocacy and lobbying interchangeably, there is an important distinction between the two. Advocacy is educating and creating awareness among key stakeholders (e.g., state and city legislators, the general public, etc.) on issues facing the community and the importance of aligning public policy to address the needs within the community. Advocacy does not endorse or oppose specific legislation, but rather informs the community at large how public policy decisions impact service provision.

Lobbying is the act of asking an elected official to take a particular position on a specific piece of legislation or issue. Lobbying can often be thought of as educating a legislator on an issue and including a specific request, such as explicit support of a bill or increased funding for a particular program. Employees, volunteers and board members of 501(c)(3)s are not prohibited from [lobbying](#), however there are limitations imposed by the Internal Revenue Service.

Advocating to public officials is an integral part of policy development and implementation at every level. Without your data, analysis, knowledge of community needs and expert opinion, lawmakers would not be able to develop effective solutions.

Quick Facts: What You Can Do

Here are some examples of advocacy activities:

- Share your efforts with policymakers, clients, constituencies, coalition partners, friends and family
- Share your success in these efforts by using poll data, explaining and analyzing trends found in your state, providing evidence of the ability of state and local advocates to improve health and wellbeing of women and girls, lead them to optimal health outcomes and improve population-level health
- Recruit community coalition members and local advocates to meet with your congressional delegation district staff or participate in a public forum being held by your legislator(s) or candidates
- Build relationships with your local congressional district staff and the staff of state officials so they will come to you as the expert in issue areas
 - Conduct educational Hill visits with your congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. and with your state legislators
 - Submit a letter to the editor on an issue area and the impact that sexual health and reproductive justice legislation has on the wellbeing and quality of life for Black women
 - Provide policymakers with the background information they need to write legislation or proclamations for Women's Health Month, World AIDS Day, World Hepatitis Day or any women's health awareness days
 - Engage in social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to reach the public, elected officials and your constituencies



Using Social Media to Amplify Education

Social media allows you to reach wider audiences and can be integrated into most of your efforts, including your organization’s advocacy work and outreach to women and communities on sexual and reproductive health policy development and community engagement. Below is a list of social media outlets that can bring more attention to work being done in both reproductive health and reproductive justice:

- **Twitter** (www.twitter.com): Send short messages (140 characters or less) about your advocacy activities or about public health issues to your followers. The tweets can be easily “retweeted” by other users.
- **Facebook** (www.facebook.com): Post information about public health issues on your program or organization’s wall or status and update the page with new advocacy activities in which you are participating. Invite your friends to join you at a town hall or meeting. Share pictures, stories and infographics about the activities.
- **Blogs**: If your organization has a blog, use it to promote your activities. Post all the essential information (location, date, time, etc.) and provide frequent updates to encourage your readers to join you in your efforts. This can also be a forum for readers to post questions in the comments section, which you will be able to answer and potentially address in future posts.

Twitter Examples from the Field:

[Natasha T. Brown](#) @NatashaTBrown May 8

TUNE IN: [#LessonsFromMom](#): Three Generations of Health Podcast with the Black Women's Health Imperative... <http://fb.me/3CJtKYcZf>
[View summary](#) 0 retweets 0 favorites
[Reply](#) [Retweet](#) [Favorite](#) [Follow](#)

Examples from the Field: Ms. Blog

Roe at 40: Reproductive Justice for Black Women

January 22, 2013 by [Atima Omara-Alwala](#) | [3 Comments](#)



The arrival of the 40th anniversary of [Roe v. Wade](#) has come today with the expected media commemorating (or in the case of the antis, vilifying) the occasion. From the “where are they nows” to the current state of reproductive politics, what remains glaring to me again, particularly since 2012, is the continued lack of women-of-color voices represented in the mainstream debate on reproductive justice.

Well on this, the 40th anniversary of [Roe v. Wade](#), I want to remind everyone why this black



Elected Officials and Government Policymakers

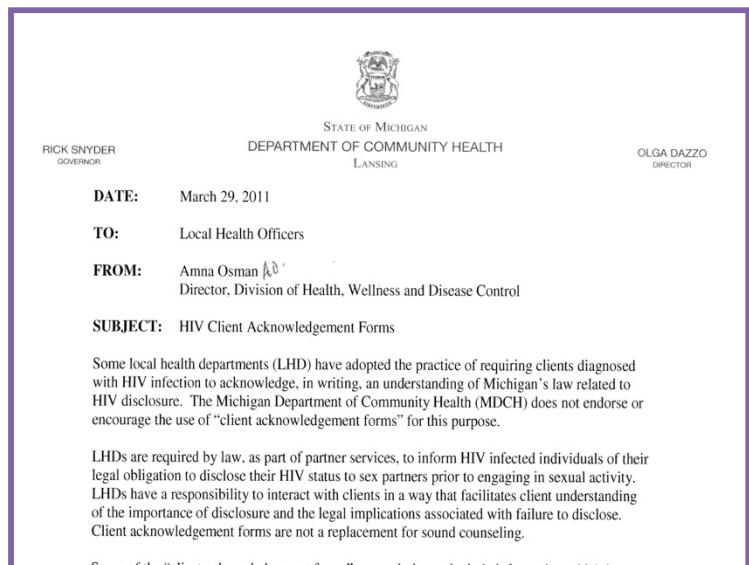
While much emphasis is placed on advocating for additional funding and policy change with elected officials, there are other parts of government that are important in budget development, funding allocations and policy development. Administrators and staff within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are important resources and should be included in your outreach. It is equally important to identify opportunities within state and local government agencies to educate and impact Black women's sexual and reproductive health.

Advocates and health officials on the state and local levels should be working together to unify their efforts across all levels of government. Both groups, including advocates, public health officials and other policy-makers should be reaching out to one another to discuss the commonalities and differences in terms of their priorities, programs and policies.

Some things you can advocate for in your policy recommendations:

- Proclamations and resolutions to commemorate Women's Health Month along with other awareness days from your Congressional delegation, Governor, state legislators, Mayor, City Council or County Supervisors
- Formal creation of a state and city task force on women's reproductive health by your elected officials, if not already in place
- Review of practices surrounding women's reproductive health and availability of services at local health departments and clinics. The

Michigan Department of Community Health, for example, sent a [policy guidance](#) to local health departments discouraging the use of acknowledgement forms (picture right).



Policy Statements

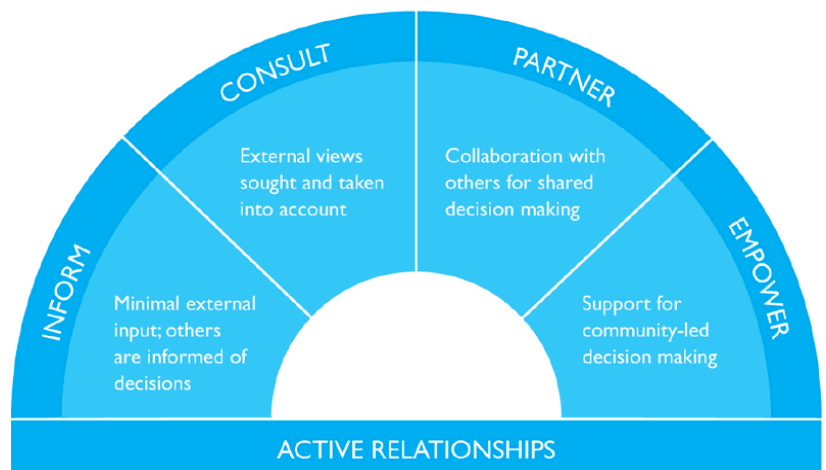
Developing policy statements and recommendations can inform policymakers and the public of your plans and provide an outline of the specific issue areas where your advocacy efforts or organization intends to focus. Once you have cultivated a working relationship with the staff of your local, state and federal elected offices, they will often come to you for insight on public health-related issues, particularly with regard to Black women and reproductive health. In the interim, releasing policy statements can be influential tools that ensure a voice in the policy-making process.

Community Engagement

Community or public engagement is a general term used for a number of methods where members of the public become more informed about or work to influence public decisions.¹ Effective engagement efforts provide policymakers and other state officials more insight into identifying the values, ideas and recommendations of the communities that they serve. It also presents an opportunity for residents to better understand an issue and its impact, leading to greater community ownership for the initiative. Due to this increased understanding, transparency and trust, projects move faster with less need to revisit specific details repeatedly. Community engagement goes beyond the legislative and grant-required planning activities that come with specific funding.

Some principles to use when trying to increase community engagement are:²

- **Inclusive Planning and Internal/External Participation** - Developing a successful engagement effort should include input from health department staff, academic institutions, local advocates and members of the communities that will be served. The planning should include a wide array of people and viewpoints that will be reflective of the community population.
 - Transparency** - The process of planning, designing and making decisions should be as clear as possible for all involved stakeholders
- **Evaluation** - Sponsors and participants should evaluate efforts by collecting feedback and actively working to incorporate these suggestions into the next engagement opportunity
- **Opportunity** - Community members have a wealth of first-hand experience. Oftentimes, they need to know that the opportunities are there for them to share their experience themselves and share any concerns.



Meaningful community engagement can lead to higher rates of community participation, buy-in and support. Developing an effective communication plan to reach communities is important to ensure that

¹ "What is Public Engagement?" Institute for Local Government. http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/what_is_public_engagement_jan_2012_2.pdf. July 2012. Accessed February 2014.

² "Principles of Local Government Public Engagement." Institute for Local Government. http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/principles_of_local_government_public_engagement_kp_6.pdf November 2012. Accessed February 2014.

their input is being captured. Reaching out to local media, clergy and congregations, leadership and advocacy groups, and others, particularly those that serve your target communities can be very effective. Newsletters and blog posts are flexible ways that can be updated regularly to reflect any changing or evolving policy, program, activity or general updates. The “Oregon Reproductive Health Program Update Newsletter” is a great example of an innovative way of keeping community partners engaged through online communication.



Examples of effective community engagement include:³

- **Public Information Outreach:** This usually entails uninterrupted communication from the state, county, local public officials to residents of the community, informing them of a public problem, issue or policy matter. Examples include a newspaper article, newsletter or a presentation.
- **Public Consultation:** Often characterized by local officials asking for recommendations from residents about public decisions and actions with little discussion or interchange. Examples include stand-alone community conversations for specific issues.
- **Sustained Public Problem Solving:** This type of

engagement typically occurs through coalitions, committees and task forces that work to address an issue for a sustained period of time.

Coalition Building

A coalition is a group of individuals or organizations with a common interest working together toward a shared goal. The goal can be as finite as securing funding for a policy intercession, or as expansive as working to identify a permanent solution to advance the quality of life for people in a community.⁴

Community issues, like reproductive health and justice, are too large and complex for any one agency or organization to fully address. In addition to other public engagement efforts, creating a coalition of groups and individuals is an effective strategy to bring the community's resources to bear, and get everyone moving in the same direction. Generally, coalitions can concentrate the community's focus on a particular problem, create alliances among those who might not normally work together and keep the community's approach to issues consistent.

³ “What is Public Engagement?” Institute for Local Government. http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/what_is_public_engagement_jan_2012_2.pdf. July 2012. Accessed February 2014.

⁴ “Choosing Strategies to Promote Community Health and Development,” in Community Tool Box. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/promotion-strategies/start-a-coalition/main>. 2013. Accessed February 2014



Coalition goals are as varied as coalitions themselves, but often contain elements of one or more of the following:

- Influencing or developing public policy, usually around a specific issue
- Increasing funding for specific aspects of reproductive health programs
- Changing people's behavior (increasing condom use, for instance)
- Building a mentally, physically and socially healthy community.

Barriers to Starting a Coalition

There are often barriers to starting a coalition, and it is important to be aware of and anticipate them, because they may dictate the process the coalition will need to follow in order to begin successfully. Among the most likely:

- **Turf issues** - Organizations are often hesitant about sharing their work, stakeholders and especially their funding. Part of starting a coalition may be to demonstrate the benefits to the involved organizations that working together will bring.
- **Bad history** - Organizations, individuals or the community as a whole may have had previous experiences with government officials that make working with particular groups not possible. A new coalition will need to contend with this history before it can actually start the work it needs to do.
- **Domination by "professionals"** - At times, health department staff or academicians, sometimes with advanced degrees, local politicians, business leaders, gatekeepers and others, in a rush to solve problems, neglect to involve the people most impacted by the issue at hand, in this case Black women, and other community members. Creating a participatory atmosphere with those who have first-hand experience with these issues is almost always part of starting a coalition.

Part of a solution may be providing support for those who are not used to a more formal way of holding meetings and reaching conclusions, while at the same time training professionals and others to be more inclusive of differing opinions. This might mean bringing in an outside facilitator or simply paying careful attention to guiding the process from within the group. In addition, hosting meetings in non-traditional spaces and creating events for discussion-based sharing, may provide informal opportunities for community members to engage and share their experiences.

Community members at times have trouble dealing with or understanding the bureaucracy and politics that surrounds public health and reproductive health, in particular, so it is important to communicate these barriers to them and provide them with avenues to share their concerns.

Social Media

Engaging community members, clients and consumers through technology is a way to reach audiences who cannot or would not normally participate in more standard engagement methods. Creating and maintaining interactive Twitter and Facebook pages allows for constructive input to help shape your continued efforts. Additionally, online survey platforms, like SurveyMonkey or SurveyGizmo, allow a greater number of people to voice their opinions. These methods will also help to tap into younger demographics and their much needed point-of-view in addressing the evolving reproductive justice policy landscape.



The Legislative Process

How a Bill Becomes a Law

1. A member of Congress introduces a bill.

When a senator or representative introduces a bill, it is sent to the clerk of the Senate or House, who gives it a number and title. Next, the bill goes to the appropriate committee.

2. Committees review and vote on the bill.

Committees specialize in different areas, such as foreign relations or agriculture, and are made up of small groups of senators or representatives.

The committee may reject the bill and “table” it, meaning it is never discussed again. Or it may hold hearings to listen to facts and opinions, make changes in the bill and cast votes. If most committee members vote in favor of the bill, it is sent back to the Senate and the House for debate.

3. The Senate and the House debate and vote on the bill.

Separately, the Senate and the House debate the bill, offer amendments and cast votes. If the bill is defeated in either the Senate or the House, the bill dies.

Authorization Process	
Process	What You Can Do
Bill is drafted	Weigh in with your Member(s) of Congress to get them to support the bill as original cosponsors before introduction
Bill is introduced and referred to Committee of jurisdiction(s)	Weigh in with your Member(s) of Congress to cosponsor if not already done
Bill stays in Committee, typically subcommittee	Weigh in with Committee Members, particularly on subcommittee to cosponsor, bill
Bill is marked up in Committee and voted on to move to the floor	Weigh in with Committee Members and leadership
Bill is voted on the floor	Weigh in with all Members of Congress
If approved by Congress, bill sent to President	Weigh in with White House

Sometimes, the House and the Senate pass the same bill, but with different amendments. In these cases, the bill goes to a conference committee made up of members of Congress. The conference committee works out differences between the two versions of the bill.

Then the bill goes before all of Congress for a vote. If a majority of both the Senate and the House votes for the bill, it goes to the President for approval.

4. The President signs the bill – or not.

If the President approves the bill and signs it, the bill becomes a law. However, if the President disapproves, he can veto the bill by refusing to sign it.

Congress can try to overrule a veto. If both the Senate and the House pass the bill by a two-thirds majority, the President's veto is overruled and the bill becomes a law.



Hill Day and Visits Guide

How to Schedule a Hill Visit

Call the national office of the Member of Congress. The phone number can easily be found on the House and Senate web sites www.house.gov and www.senate.gov or you can call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for the office of your Senators and/or Representative. When you call the office, staff will answer the phone.

If you are a constituent or are scheduling a visit on behalf of constituents, you can try to schedule a meeting with the Member of Congress. You will be directed to the scheduler in the office who sets the Member's calendar.

For the most part you will be scheduling a meeting with the health staffer in the office responsible for issues such as women's health and reproductive health. Tell the staff person that you would like to speak to the person that handles health issues and schedule a meeting with this person. If this person is unavailable, leave a message. Often times it will be easier to send an e-mail meeting request rather than a phone request. The health staffer may give you his or her e-mail over the phone however congressional staff are not permitted to give out e-mail addresses of other staff. You can ask for the health staffer's name and correct spelling. Typically in the House, e-mail addresses are firstname.lastname@mail.house.gov and in the Senate are firstname_lastname@senatorlastname.senate.gov.

Key opportunities to speak to your Members of Congress		
Date	Process	What You Can Do
January - December	District work periods occur almost monthly. To determine when a Member is in the district consult the House and Senate calendars.	Meet with your Member of Congress at the district office
August-September	Summer Recess for House and Senate. Every even numbered year all Members of the House are up for re-election and one-third of the Senate. Your Members of Congress will be back in your district heavily campaigning.	Meet with your Member(s) of Congress at a campaign event, fundraiser, community event or at the district office
October	House typically adjourns, especially in election years.	Meet with your House representative in-district.
The Tuesday after the first Monday of November	Election Day	Vote!

Be sure to highlight if there is going to be a constituent at the meeting whether you are scheduling the meeting over the phone or in an e-mail.

This process is the same for in-district meetings with your Member of Congress and fairly universal when contacting state and locally elected officials. Be sure to find the appropriate contact information for each office. State and local officials rely on their staff just as Congressional Members do and you will most likely be meeting with the health staffer in their office.



Sample E-Mail Request Letter

[Date]

The Honorable _____

[Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

To: [Full name of health staffer]

Re: [Constituent] Meeting on [legislation/policy issue/funding decision]

Dear [Name of health staffer]:

I am writing on behalf of [name of organization/constituency], which is [describe your organization/constituency, including where it is based and where it operates, who you represent, etc.]. I am requesting a brief meeting with you on [policy/legislation/funding decision/etc.] for [date and window of time available] however I can work with you on scheduling a convenient time. This [issue] is critical to addressing the risks for women and girls, associated with limited or reduced access to safe and accurate reproductive health services and information. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Address]

[Contact information]



Before the Hill Visit

Identify the Issues

When you are going on a visit take time to identify the issues you would like to discuss prior to walking in the door. It is always important to educate Members and staff about the reproductive health and policy issues within their state or district. If you are meeting with an authorizer, be sure to talk with them about legislation they have jurisdiction over, i.e. an abortion bill or sex education resolution. If you are meeting with an appropriator, be sure to talk with them about funding needs for women's reproductive health care and access.

Identify Roles for the Meeting

For group visits or visits with more than one person, be sure to plan who will speak on each issue. This will ensure that all speakers are prepared and that no issues are lost in the shuffle. You should identify a "facilitator" who frames the issues, hands out materials, makes sure that all the issues are covered, keeps track of time and introduces each presenter.

Know What You Want From Your Meeting

When you discuss issues with a Member or staff, you should always have an "ask," i.e. support increased funding, co-sponsor a bill, sign onto a letter. This should be the first thing that you do after introducing yourself or the group. Staffers will tend to have writing materials on hand and will typically first write down who you are and then your ask.

In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda Talking Points:

- National organizational initiative designed to amplify and lift up the voices of Black women at the national and regional level; using a bottom up approach to strategically mobilize constituents to support and influence policies that support reproductive justice for all women and girls.
- In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda is a Reproductive Justice partnership between five Black women's Reproductive Justice organizations
 - Black Women for Wellness
 - Black Women's Health Imperative
 - New Voices Pittsburgh
 - SisterLove, Inc.
 - SPARK Reproductive Justice Now
- Focuses on three key policy issues: abortion rights and access, contraceptive equity and comprehensive sex education.
- We approach our work with four main goals:
 - To establish a leadership voice for Black women on reproductive rights, health and justice policy at the national level;
 - To build a coordinated grassroots movement of Black women in support of abortion rights and access, including ending the onerous funding restrictions, contraceptive equity and comprehensive sex education;
 - To lay the foundation for ongoing policy change at the national and state levels that impacts the lives and wellbeing of Black women and their families; and
 - To engage and motivate Black women as a traditionally underrepresented group to use their voting power in the American electorate.



Know Your Target

Be sure to know party affiliation, committee or subcommittee membership of the member and past record on the issue. These facts will help guide your discussion and convey that you have done your homework. It is also important to target your meeting request depending on whether the Member of Congress is an authorizer or appropriator.

Bring Written Materials

Make sure you have materials as a leave-behind packet that contains pertinent information on the topics you are going to address. Brief jurisdiction-specific information on Black women and reproductive justice is always preferred. While introducing yourself, you can briefly go over what the leave-behind packet contains or point to which sheet is relevant while discussing the issues with the staffer. Do not assume that staffers will not use the materials.

Be Prepared

Be sure you have all your facts and arguments lined up prior to the meeting. If you cannot answer a question, tell them you will get back to them with the information and be sure to do so or ask a colleague who can get the information to follow-up. Anticipate questions or arguments against your position on an issue.

During the Hill Visit

Getting There

It is very important to arrive on time. If you are late, you are likely to miss your appointment entirely. As a courtesy, call the office if you are running late. Make sure to give yourself plenty of time to travel to the office to account for security lines into the building.

Meeting with the Member of Congress or Staffer?

Your Member of Congress will most likely not be available to meet with you and you will meet with the staff person responsible for health issues. This staffer is typically the health legislative assistant or aide who is responsible for and reports directly to the Member on health issues. It is not a negative thing to meet with the staffer. Legislators are very busy and rely a great deal on their staff and do receive detailed reports on visits with constituents. It is not unusual for the staffer to be young.

As a voting constituent you may be able to meet directly with your Member, especially if the Member is from a smaller state or district. These are called Member-level visits and your Member will always be accompanied by his or her staff. Keep in mind that occasionally something unforeseen comes up and even if you were expecting to meet with your Member, you may see the staffer instead. Remember that staff members are just as important as meeting with the Member and can be very important in shaping legislation and policy. When building a relationship with your Member, it is also important to build a relationship with this staff person.



Example: Reproductive Justice Policy Talking Points:

- Core Reproductive Justice principles:
 - The right to have children;
 - The right to not have children; and
 - The right to nurture the children we have in a safe and healthy environment.
- Since 1973, women in America have had the legal right to have an abortion. But having the legal right does not necessarily mean you have access to that right - - especially for low-income women.
- The Hyde Amendment denies low-income women the ability to make their own decisions about whether and when to have children by restricting federal insurance coverage. Over the past years, we have also seen many states impose restrictions and other barriers to obtaining abortion health care services. *(Talk about your own experience in your state or region)*
- Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance (EACH Woman) Act, H.R.2972, marks a long-needed change for women and their families by creating two important standards for reproductive health:
 - First, it respects that every woman should be able to make her own decisions about pregnancy. If a woman gets her health care through the federal government, she will be covered for all pregnancy-related care, including abortion
 - Second, it prohibits political interference with decisions of private health insurance companies to offer coverage for abortion care.
- Anti-abortion legislators in the states continue to place restrictions on women seeking abortion health care. For example:
 - Ultrasound even when it is not medically indicated
 - Banning funds for health centers that provide affordable birth control and women's health care to low-income women if they also provide abortions
 - Bans on insurance coverage of abortion for low-income women
- In a **recent poll**, 85 percent of Black women and men agreed to the statement "when it comes to abortion, we should trust Black women to make the important personal decisions that are best for themselves and their families." This statement had agreement across gender, age, education, and political ideology, including 82 percent of self-identified conservatives and 81 percent of respondents who identified themselves as being very religious.
- In this same poll, over eight in ten respondents view contraceptives as part of women's basic health care.
- Under the Affordable Care Act, (ACA) all new private health care plans written on or after August 1, 2012 must cover contraceptive counseling and services and all U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved methods without out-of-pocket costs to patients. While the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services approved an exemption for some religious employers, on June 30, 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court issued decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* that allows closely held, for-profit firms to opt out of the contraceptive coverage mandate in the ACA.
- In our [poll](#), African Americans Attitudes on Abortion, Contraceptive and Teen Sexual Health, respondents stated that high school sex education should cover "everything from how to prevent diseases to birth control, abstinence, domestic abuse, and healthy relationships."
- Eight in ten also believed that teenagers should have access to contraception.
- Responsible Education About Life (Real) Act, S611/H.R.1511, would provide funding for states to implement comprehensive approaches to sex education in the schools— approaches that include information about both abstinence and contraception and condoms.



Introduce Yourself

Open the meeting with an introduction. Handing out your business card at the beginning of the meeting provides ease in name recognition and may be used by the staff for future reference. It can also be useful to tell your personal story if you are directly impacted by any of our priority issues in your introduction.

Some sample introductions are below:

“Thank you for taking this meeting. My name is X and I am a lifelong resident of state Y. I am the founder of Z organization; working with Black women and girls that have experienced homelessness or intimate partner violence. I very much appreciate this opportunity to speak with you about some important issues for our community.”

“Hello, Congresswoman X. My name is Y and work at Z where I see constituents such as myself who became pregnant at a young age. I am here to talk with you about reproductive health policies and the impact in your district, and some things that the advocacy community would like you to do to champion several issues for us such as A, B and C.”

The Ask

The ask is the most important part of the meeting. The staffer is expecting concise and clear information from you on your issue as well as a specific ask. Your conversation should revolve around the ask and address any concerns the staffer may have. To be sure that the staffer will take your ask to your

Example In Our Own Voice and State-Specific “Ask(s)”:

- EACH Woman Act (HR 2972)-“removes barriers on abortion coverage currently imposed by the Hyde amendment.” *Provide Member/staff with EACH Woman Act Fact Sheet*
- Comprehensive Sex Education-“the REAL Education for Healthy Youth Act (HR 1706), introduced by Representative Barbara Lee; is a measure to provide funding to states for comprehensive sexuality education programs that would include medically accurate information about abstinence and contraception.”
- Title X-“defunding Title X limits women’s access to family planning resources that are safe and affordable.”
- *State specific information and “asks” on abortion access, contraceptive equity and comprehensive sex education provided as a separate handout. You can also access information at the following:*
 - Abortion access, NARAL Pro-Choice America, <http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/government-and-you/state-governments/>
 - Contraceptive access, National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/government-and-you/state-governments/>
 - Comprehensive Sex Education, National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-policies-on-sex-education-in-schools.aspx>



Member of Congress, you can verbally ask for a commitment such as “can I count on Member X to support this?” or “how can I ensure that Member X will support this?”

The Meeting Location and Duration

Given the limited space in Congressional offices, meetings happen in all sorts of places, from the Member’s office to the hallway. You should not take it personally if you need to meet in the hallway. Just block out the distractions and go on with your meeting. Most meetings will last at most 20 minutes. It is important to ask the Member or staff in the beginning how much time they have available to meet.

Thank the Member or Staff

Always start off a meeting by thanking a Member for their support or ask the staff to thank their boss for you. Letting an office know that you recognize the important role they play is always appreciated.

Assume No Knowledge

Members and staff are less familiar with your issues than you. Be sure to explain all acronyms, programs, funding sources, which agencies administer the funds, etc. Be comfortable with having to dedicate more time in the meeting to going over the basics of a program or reproductive health itself. Any chance you have to further a staffer’s knowledge will help establish a working relationship with the office and you as a trusted resource.

Keep it Local

If possible, explain your position in terms that relate to the Member’s district or state. Provide information on the status of affairs in their state. This helps them identify with the problem and understand why they need to be of assistance.

Ask Questions

Meetings should be seen as a two-way street, with information flowing both ways. Take the opportunity to find out where the Member stands on the issues you are presenting if not already known to you.

Ask questions such as: “Where do you see your boss being on this issue...?” “I know your office has/has not cosponsored X before, do you foresee any issues coming up in cosponsoring Y?” “What do you think is the best way for us to work with your office on doing X, Y and Z?”

Stay on Course

Resist any side conversations or tangential issues. Making social conversation is important, but time is limited. Do not hesitate bringing the conversation back by saying, “I know that in terms of our issue...” or “That’s a good point but when it comes to our issue...”

Use Your Expertise

In general, you will be much more knowledgeable of the issues than the person you are meeting with. Expound on this knowledge when explaining positions or making requests. In addition, you can offer yourself as an expert for them to call upon.



Hill Visit Etiquette	
DO	DON'T
Wear professional attire	Wear jeans, t-shirts or flip-flops
If multiple people in a visit, assign someone in our group as facilitator role	Talk over one another or leave someone without a speaking role
Make it personal. Talk about who you are and what expertise you bring as a constituent working in the field, or a concerned community member	Provide no human or personal element to your conversation
Offer solutions about what is working in addition to what can be done better	Complain or point fingers
When telling your story or delivering your ask be succinct and to the point	Talk about 10 different things
Read the staffer's body language to assess attentiveness	Continue talking despite cues that the meeting is over or that it is clear the staffer is not receptive
Assess the staffer's knowledge on reproductive justice policies and issues	Use jargon unless staffer is well versed
Go with the flow	Be surprised or offended if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The staffer does not know about your organization or issues • You do not get to say everything you want to; • Meet in the hallway or lobby area of the office; • Meet with a staff person rather than Member of Congress
Follow-up	Not follow-up, even if no follow-up is needed be sure to thank them

After the Hill Visit

Evaluation of the Meeting

Be sure to write down any information that was disclosed in the meeting that would be helpful following up. The most important information is a definitive answer to your "ask(s)" such as: "Yes/ no I will cosponsor X." Other useful information can be any personal connections that relate to the issues you discussed and jurisdiction-specific information that influence the Member's understanding and support for the issues.



Member of Congress Educational Visit – Evaluation

Representative/Senator: _____

Staff person/people you met with:

Name: _____ Title: _____

Does the Representative support any of the following:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| • Abortion Rights | YES | NO |
| • Eliminating Hyde funding restrictions on abortion | YES | NO |
| • Funding for contraceptives | YES | NO |
| • Comprehensive sex education | YES | NO |

Was the Member/staff courteous? YES NO

Was the Member/staff familiar with your organization? YES NO

Was the Member/staff familiar with the National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda? YES NO

Are there follow-up materials the office requested? YES NO

If so, what materials were requested? _____

Please list other persons in your group? _____

Please complete evaluation form and return to Michelle, ~~Benetta~~ or Donna.



Follow Up

Be sure to send a thank you email to people with whom you have met reiterating your points, providing them with any information you promised and thanking them for their time. The goal is to maintain relationships with offices so that they turn to you for information when legislative decisions are made.

Sample E-Mail Request Letter

Please tailor to include points made in your meeting and follow-up information requested, state specific information, and/or to invite them to visit you the next time they are back in the state or district.

[Date]

The Honorable _____

[Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

To: [Full name of health staffer]

Re: [Constituent] Meeting on [legislation/policy issue/funding decision]

Dear [Name of health staffer]:

I would like to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me on [date]. As we discussed in the meeting, [issues discussed] is/are necessary to ensure the wellbeing of women and their families. [You or your organization] is/are committed to finding solutions to reduce the morbidity or mortality associated to unsafe or inaccurate reproductive health options and hope [Member of Congress] can join me in obtaining this goal.

I look forward to working with you to ensure [restate issues discussed]. [If you would like, add state-specific issues you would like to discuss, other policy issues and be sure to include any follow-up requested of you].

Please feel free to contact me for more information. I can be reached at (###) ###-#### or myemail@email.com.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Address]



Do Emails to Congress Work?

Do my messages reach Congress? Do they matter?

The answer to both questions is yes. Messages you send reach Congress. When they arrive, they have influence. **Studies conducted by the Congressional Management Foundation** show that 94% of congressional staff members polled say that emails have a lot or some influence.

"We hope to spend about as much time answering your communication as you spend sending it to us."
~ A congressional staffer

Do I Influence My Members of Congress By Sending Email to Them?

In February 2010, Tim Hysom, Director for Communications and Technology Services at the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF), a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting a more effective Congress addressed this question. He answered:

Sending your views to Members of Congress does work, no matter what format they arrive in. Senators and Representatives want to know how their votes affect their constituents. One thing people always ask me is, "How many messages does a Member of Congress need to receive in order to change their mind?" There are as many answers to that question as there are Members of Congress: 541. Sometimes a Member can be swayed by a single heartfelt and articulate message from a constituent. Sometimes it's the sheer volume of communications that they receive that persuades them. One important note, however, is that congressional offices do like postal communications because it is easy to see that the constituent took the time to write a handwritten letter, but email is far easier for them to process and will ensure that your message arrives more quickly. The bottom line is that, yes, emails still work, but they are generally most effective if they are personal messages rather than form messages.

Postal Mail

Postal mail remains an effective ways of communicating with congress. Congressional staffers report that 44% of postal letters have a lot of influence in their offices.

When is email preferable?

Postal mail takes far longer to reach members of Congress. Most pieces of mail take more than a week to reach congressional offices because of security measures. So, while postal mail is more influential in offices, email is preferable when you want to influence a vote or decision quickly. Email is easier for offices to process and arrives more quickly than postal mail.



How Can I Make My Emails More Influential?

1. Personalize your message - Explain who you are and why the issue is important to you. Including personal stories about yourself and the district makes you stand out to congressional staff.
2. Be polite - Thank your legislator for previous votes, and courteously ask for her or his support on your issue.
3. Be concise and make a specific request - Ask your legislator to cosponsor or vote yes or no on a specific bill.



UNITED STATES CAPITOL GETTING HERE

Located at the center of Washington, D.C., the U.S. Capitol Building and other buildings on Capitol Hill are easily accessible via multiple public transportation centers. Parking on Capitol Hill is very limited and it is recommended that visitors utilize public transportation when possible.

To assist in planning your visit, below are a few additional resources regarding traveling to Capitol Hill.

Important Information for Your Visit

Located across Capitol Hill are the buildings and grounds of the U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Supreme Court, and Library of Congress. Most of the buildings and grounds, such as the U.S. Capitol, are open and free to the public. However, for public safety, many buildings have restrictions on items that may be brought into the buildings.

Access to the Capitol Visitor Center

For more detailed information on getting to the Capitol Visitor Center go to visitthecapitol.gov/visit/getting_to_the_capitol.

Public Transportation-www.wmata.com

- Metro is the easiest and cheapest way to reach Capitol Hill
- Purchase a SmartTrip card at the Metro station – at least \$1.75 each way
- www.wmata.com for more information on Metro

Senate Side

- Russel, Dirksen and Hart buildings
 - Metro accessible (approximately 10 min transit)
 - From your hotel: board Red Line (towards Glenmont) train at Dupont Circle Metro Station
 - Exit train at Union Station and walk approximately .4 miles to reach any of the Senate office buildings

House Side

- Cannon, Langworth and Rayburn buildings
 - Metro accessible (approximately 17 min transit)
 - From your hotel: board Red Line (towards Glenmont) train at DuPont Circle Metro Station
 - Change trains at Metro Center Station and board Orange Line (towards New Carrollton) train
 - Exit train at Federal Center station and walk approximately .4 miles to reach any of the House office buildings

voice
 IN OUR OWN
 National Black Women's
 Reproductive Justice
 Agenda

Capitol Hill Map





UNITED STATES CAPITOL PROHIBITED ITEMS

In order to ensure the safety of visitors and staff and to preserve the collections, facilities and historic buildings and grounds some items are prohibited at the U.S. Capitol.

Visitors to the U.S. Capitol are screened by a magnetometer, and all items that are permitted inside the building are screened by an x-ray device. Visitors should keep their belongings with them at all times as unattended items may result in a disruption of service at the Capitol.

The following items are strictly prohibited in the Capitol, including the Capitol Visitor Center:

- Liquid, including water
- Food or beverage of any kind, including fruit and unopened packaged food
- Aerosol containers
- Non-aerosol sprays (Prescriptions for medical needs are permitted.)
- Any pointed object, e.g., knitting needles and letter openers (Pens and pencils are permitted.)
- Any bag larger than 18" wide x 14" high x 8.5" deep
- Electric stun guns, martial arts weapons or devices
- Guns, replica guns, ammunition and fireworks
- Knives of any size
- Mace and pepper spray
- Razors and box cutters

Please note that the U.S. Capitol Police are authorized to make exceptions if a prohibited item is determined to be necessary and required to serve child care, medical or other special needs. If you have questions, please call the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services at 202.224.4048.

The following items are not allowed in the Senate and House Galleries:

- Battery-operated electronic devices (medical devices are permitted)
- Cameras
- Cans and bottles
- Creams, lotions or perfume
- Packages, briefcases, backpacks or suitcases
- Strollers
- Video recorders or any type of recording device

Each Gallery operates a check stand where visitors may store these items securely while they are visiting that Gallery. Also, note that smoking is not permitted anywhere in the Capitol, and food and drink are only allowed in the Capitol Visitor Center Restaurant.