

How to effectively talk to your member of Congress

Should I send a letter or make a phone call?

By **Emily Ellsworth** @editoremiye

**I worked for Congress for 6 years.
Here's what I learned about how they listen to constituents.**

First, tweeting or writing on Facebook is **largely ineffective**. I never looked at those comments except to remove the harassing ones.

Second, writing a letter to the **district office (state) is better** than sending an email or writing a letter to DC.

But, **the most effective thing is to actually call** them on the phone. At their district (state) office. They have to talk to you there.

We repped half a million people, it was impossible to read and respond personally to all letters. Impossible.

This was something in particular that I cared about as a staffer and worked very hard on, but the sheer volume of emails is overwhelming

So, we batched them with computer algorithms and sent out form letters based on topic and position. Regardless of method received.

But, phone calls! That was a thing that shook up our office from time. One time, a radio host gave out our district office phone # on air.

He was against our immigration policy and told our constituents to call. **And they did. All. Day. Long.** All I did all day was answer phones.

It was exhausting and **you can bet my bosses heard about it.** We had discussions because of that call to action.

If we started getting a pattern of calls, I called up our DC office and asked if they were getting the same calls and we talked.

Also, recognize that your letters and your emails get seen by **staffers**, just like your phone calls get answered. That's the way of it.

If you want to talk to your rep, show up at town hall meetings. Get a huge group that they can't ignore. Pack that place and ask questions.

We held town halls consistently that fewer than 50 people showed up for. And it was always the same people. So, shake it up.

As always, please **be kind but firm** with those staffers. They will listen and talk to you. I always, always did.

If you run an advocacy group, invite local staffers to show up to your events. Let them talk to people you work with and set up meetings.

I loved getting out of my office and meeting with **advocates in immigration, healthcare, education, science, and every type of work.**

Invite staffers on "field trips" and show them what it's like in your communities. Show them the work you are doing. It works.

Are you noticing a pattern here? **The staff are the ones who run the ground game for Congress.** Work on helping them understand and learn.

Because, if the staff knows you, when they have a question about a piece of legislation or amendment, they will be the one you call.

I've been called out a few times for my suggestions being ableist, and I'm listening to that feedback, but I have suggestions.

Sending a personal letter to your congressman's state office **is absolutely effective.** If you can't call on the phone, try to do that.

Also, if you can get involved in **local advocacy groups** that have people who can do the in-person meetings or phone calls, that's good too.

Another FAQ: how do I know if my representative is having a town hall meeting? **Sign up for their email list and you'll get notifications.**

And, that's the best I've got for you now. I hope it helps. Use your resources the best way you can and get their attention.

**IDENTIFY your Senate & House reps.
GET their phone and contact info**
District offices are usually on their web sites



[WhosMyRepresentative.com](https://www.whosmyrepresentative.com)