



ADVANCING POLICY CHANGE: FIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO TODAY

You know the saying that the longest journeys start with just one step? Well, changing policy is a long journey. Here are five easy first steps.

1. JOIN AN ALLIANCE OF ADVOCATES.

There is strength in numbers and a vibrant web of advocacy organizations already exists across the country. Rather than having to craft your strategies, materials and goals from scratch, plug into an existing alliance of advocates to help inform your work.

- [Partnership for America's Children](#): a national network of child advocacy organizations
- [State Priorities Partnership](#): an alliance of research and policy nonprofits in 40 states
- [Faith in Action](#): a faith-based community organizing network
- Give the ol' google a good workout and you will likely find a national or state network to plug into related to your topic of interest

2. SCHEDULE A MEETING WITH YOUR FEDERAL LAWMAKERS' DISTRICT STAFF.

Your [Senators and Representatives](#) have offices both in Washington D.C. and "in-district." You can visit your federal delegation's district-level staff without having to travel all the way to DC. Oftentimes, these can be more meaningful interactions since the district staff aren't as swept up in the day-to-day proceedings in DC. You should go into these meetings with a basic understanding of the federal issues that matter for your nonprofit. Consider directly inviting the Member of Congress to come see your nonprofit's work "in action" the next time they are in town.

3. LEARN WHO REPRESENTS YOU IN STATE, COUNTY, AND CITY GOVERNMENT. INVITE THEM TO COME TOUR.

Federal policymakers get a lot of attention, but the policies being passed at your city, county, and state levels also have profound impacts on people's lives. In my experience, the lower the level of government, the less partisan and more accessible lawmakers are. It tends to be easier to make changes at the city, county and sometimes state level.

Open States has a handy [lookup tool](#) for you to find out who represents you in the state legislature. Google to find your county commission and city council. Most elected leaders at the city and county level represent certain geographies. Now that you have a list of four to six state and local lawmakers, email them an invitation to come tour your organization and see it in action. Don't make more out of this than it needs to be. It doesn't need to be a big "dog and pony" show, just an opportunity for them to come meet you and your staff, pose for a few photos, and see what you do. Expect a 30-minute visit at most.

4. UNDERSTAND THE POLICIES IMPACTING YOUR WORK.

You don't need to become a policy expert in order to advocate, but you should have a basic understanding of the policies impacting your organization's work.

- At the national level, the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#), [Brookings Institute](#) and [Urban Institute](#) are great resources.
- For state level policies, I find the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) to be a great resource. When people are newly elected to government, NCSL provides them with initial training and tutorials to get up to speed on a broad array of issues.
- There are fewer resources at the local level, but one of my favorites is the [National League of Cities](#). For health issues, [Change Lab Solutions](#) is a treasure trove.

5. MAKE SURE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTS TO YOUR ELECTED LEADERS.

Our political lives are increasingly playing out over social media, especially twitter. Use your organization's social media presence to connect with elected leaders. Twitter has already compiled a list of [handles for members of Congress](#). Invite them to follow your organization. As you see news stories or resources you want to share with lawmakers, you can use social media to @ them.