

# Federal Advocacy Cheat Sheet

A collection of tips and tricks for WECR Caucus Members



## Overview of Federal government entities you can reach out to:

What they do, who works there, and when you should reach out to each.

### Executive Agencies

#### I. Federal Agencies (DC headquarters)

- A. Examples: The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), US Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- B. What they do: These agencies are charged with carrying out laws like the Clean Water Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, the Farm Bill, and much more. They have tons of programs, and often run these programs with cooperation from states, cities, and NGOs. Headquarters are usually in Washington, DC.

#### II. Federal Agency Regional Offices

- A. Examples: EPA Region 2 (which serves New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands), US Army Corps of Engineers Jacksonville District (which supervises projects in the southeast and in Puerto Rico)
- B. What they do: They work with their headquarters to carry out implementation of programs, enforcement of laws, and outreach at the regional level.

#### III. When is it helpful to contact them for advocacy?

- A. Agency political leadership: Good to connect to in coalition/as groups of orgs to voice support and/or concerns, especially right before or right after big initiatives, or start of new administrations.
- B. Agency political staffers: Work with them on implementation new initiatives important to president/leadership
- C. Agency career staffers: Work with them on implementation of programs that have existed for a while, or on technical

concerns/questions. Good to educate on community perspectives as they are often very removed. Often very used to the status quo for better and for worse.

#### IV. How do you contact them?

- A. Agency staff contact information is frequently publicly available on agency websites. If not, talk to someone from PolicyLink or a federal advocacy expert from the Caucus for help!



## White House Offices

These are special agencies that are often very small, and answer directly to White House leadership. Learn more about each office and when it is helpful to contact them for advocacy.

### I. Council on Environmental Quality

- A. Their role is to help carry out the President's agenda by handling interagency coordination efforts and informing both presidential and agency decision-making in some instances. Almost entirely made of political appointees. There are separate sections for Freshwater, Coastal and Oceans issues, Climate, and Environmental Justice. Often also looking for ways stakeholders can show support for positive accomplishments of the administration
- B. CEQ is a great partner for brainstorming during democratic administrations, and to voice concerns regarding agency actions. They listen well, since part of their role is ensuring environmental NGOs show support for the administration. They don't have that much real power — their strength lies in convening and communications, raising the profile of certain issues, etc.

### II. Office of the Vice President

- A. Their role is to help the Vice President carry out priorities of the Vice President. Hard to reach, not that engaged on environmental issues under Biden, but could change in the future.
- B. Helpful to contact if you know the Vice President is taking ownership of something you also work on.

### III. Climate Policy Office

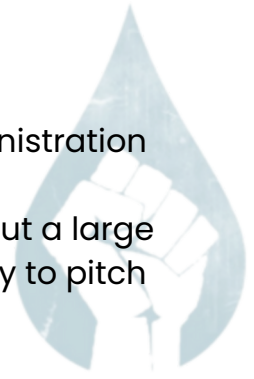
- A. A small office that has extreme influence not just executing the administration's priorities, but really developing and adjusting

administration priorities. Much more ability to shift administration policy or agency policy than CEQ. Very hard to reach.

- B. Engaging with them is rare and almost impossible without a large coalition filled with DC-based heavy hitters. The best way to pitch them is through CEQ.

#### IV. How do you contact them?

- A. Contact information is not publicly available, but the WECR caucus has connections. Just ask! CEQ is much easier to reach than the other two. Climate Policy Office is especially hard to reach without high level leadership engagement from large, well-resourced organizations.



## White House Task Forces

### I. White House Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (WHEJAC)

- A. Their role is to hold public hearings and provide issue advice to CEQ and the White House on EJ issues. Made up of a large committee of Environmental Justice advocates and in some cases long-time champions and notable figures in the EJ movement.

### II. National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (NEJAC)

- A. A formalized federal advisory committee designed to advise the EPA Administrator. Also made up of notable EJ champions and figures, who join by nomination.

### III. When is it helpful to contact them for advocacy?

- A. They are great resources for local advocates because each is made up of EJ leaders who are also local champions, from many different places. You can probably find someone who cares about your issue and your goal. The WHEJAC and NEJAC meetings are great places to voice, on the record, EJ concerns to the federal government. If you have or can develop a relationship with a member of WHEJAC or NEJAC, they can help you since they also develop reports and research that is very thorough.

### IV. How do you contact them?

- A. Through their public meetings and hearings. If you know a member of NEJAC or WHEJAC, or know somebody who knows one, you can contact them directly – but should only do so with a plan

since they are all extremely busy leaders in the environmental movement.



## Congressional Offices

### I. Senate Offices

- A. 2 per state, representing a whole state. You do not have to be in their state to engage them, especially if they are invested in an issue you work on, or if you just want to educate them on nation-wide problems. Having someone from their state with you helps.

### II. House of Representatives Offices

- A. Multiple per state, represent a specific district. You do not have to be in their district to necessarily engage with them, though partnering with someone in their district helps.

### III. DC staff vs. in-district staff

- A. Every office has staffers in DC and in their home state or district. It is good practice to engage both and if you are able to do both, that will set you apart from 99% of advocates who engage with that member of Congress. They will be more receptive to you, generally, as they will view you as a local stakeholder and a savvy and dogged advocate.

### IV. When is it helpful to contact them?

- A. Whenever you can. The more contact points the better, so long as you do so in a way that provides value to them and does not waste their time.

### V. Considerations for what congressional offices to contact

You can contact congressional offices to educate staff about problems or concerns, provide them with resources and stories and perspectives, and publicly support them (including on the internet). You can engage them by email, phone, zoom, or in person. It is especially helpful to them if you have advice regarding problems their constituents face, or issues relevant to the committees they sit on (see below).

#### A. Your representative

- 1. If you are from a Senator's state or House member's district, they will be more receptive to you.



**B. Someone who isn't your representative, but cares about your community/state**

1. Sometimes your representative isn't helpful, but someone from a neighboring district is. Or someone from a similar place in a different part of the country, or shares your demographic background.

**C. Someone who isn't your representative, but cares about your topic of concern**

1. Exactly what it sounds like

**D. Committees (and subcommittees)**

1. This is extremely important. Committee members (particularly the Chair, Vice Chair, Ranking Members of a committee) get to weigh in on what hearings on certain subjects occur, and whether proposed legislation on a given subject sees the light of day or is merely announced and goes nowhere. Google to see what Senate/House committees have jurisdiction over your issue of concern, check out their website, and then see which members are on it and who might be receptive to you. If you don't have a relationship, you can build one from scratch, or work with multiple partners at the same time to give weight to your meetings, or work with someone who already has a relationship.

**E. Committee Staff**

1. They work for the Chair and Ranking Member of a committee. These are who you contact about specific legislation, as they will have a say in what an actual bill says, whether it gets a hearing, and whether other committee members support it. If at all possible, you want committee leadership (Chair or Ranking Member) to support any proposed legislation you are helping push.

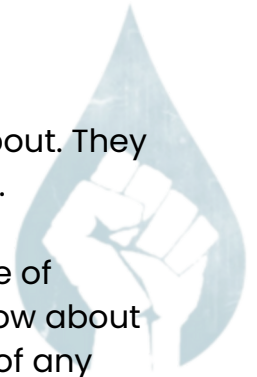
**F. Leadership**

1. Certain senior members of each party hold disproportionate sway over the Democratic agenda in each half of Congress. You may have heard the terms "Majority/Minority Leader" and this is who that refers to. They are especially helpful to educate on an issue once you have a bit of momentum, or if for example some bad bill is

an imminent threat that the party should worry about. They can influence the position of many offices at once.

#### G. New members

1. Newly elected offices are often just building a base of knowledge on different issues and likely do not know about yours, or know about your group or the dynamics of any particular advocacy space. Educating them is an easy way to build a good relationship with an office.



## Planning and Conducting Meetings

It is important to have a game plan for individual meetings, for follow ups to those meetings, and for how different meetings might work together (i.e. to create an “advocacy campaign” where different meetings work together to help get you closer to an advocacy goal). Below are some planning tips, as well as some basics about how meetings usually go.

### How a Congressional Meeting goes

Usually very quick (30 minutes max), usually one staff member who may have a ton of experience on a topic or know nothing about a topic. Maybe some small talk, maybe not. They will ask “how can I help you?” after which you can introduce yourself, your orgs, others with you, etc., and then get into the information you want them to know (i.e. telling them about something that happened, personal stories, some issue with a law, an idea for how their boss can help). Finally, you want to make sure you ask them to take a specific action, and you want to make sure you tell them you will follow up with them (and then actually do it).

### How an Agency Meeting goes

More specialists, more time (30–60 minutes). Rarely just one person. They usually appreciate an agenda being drafted and sent to them by you so they can bring in the appropriate staff to help. Maybe some small talk, maybe not. It is good to personalize things by sharing stories or anecdotes before getting into discussions about how to solve an issue. Having some specificity about solutions you want from them is good, because if you just ask a staffer to “help us get the lead out” or “stop PFAS pollution” they will simply tell you generic things the agency is doing without helping you. If you aren’t sure what kind of specific actions or solutions you should discuss, get the Caucus to

help you connect with a policy expert of some sort! Finally, make sure you have specific asks for their leadership.



## Planning Meetings

(applicable to both agencies and Congressional offices)

### Before The Meeting

- I. This is the most important part of planning. Get crystal clear about your goals for the meeting, and your plan for engagement beyond “just” this meeting.
- II. Figure out who the right person(s) is to meet with (and then learn as much about them/their reality as you can). Figure out who should come with you as well!
- III. Sharpen your “elevator pitch” regarding who you and your org/coalition is, and what you want them to do.
- IV. Develop an agenda. If meeting with agency staff, share a version of it with them.
- V. Handle any other necessary logistics like security vetting, whether there is equipment to enable both in-person and remote participation (when desired), etc.
- VI. If more than one person is attending the meeting, hold a prep session (unless this isn’t your first rodeo).

### During the meeting

- I. If in person, show up early if you can.
- II. Share your elevator pitch and your ask, then be ready to answer questions.
- III. Find small moments of human connection. Jokes encouraged! Even if the person you’re meeting seems serious, don’t take them too seriously. They’re just a person with a job and maybe a teeny bit of authority. Big whoop!
- IV. When speaking, stay focused on your main points.
- V. It’s ok to be passionate and show urgency!
- VI. If the person is giving you weird responses and/or disagreeing with you, politely discuss or debate. Ask if you can provide more information later if needed.
  - A. Remember, the disagreement may be due to lack of knowledge, in which case information can help. Or, it can be because they just don’t want to support it, in which case you should try to find



out why that is to help inform future advocacy (including whether it's worth engaging them at all, or engaging them with different partners and messengers or messaging).

- VII. Be aware that meetings often don't go according to plan for reasons outside of your control. There's no such thing as a wasted meeting, every meeting is information that is helpful to advocacy strategy.



## After the meeting

### I. Short-term

- A. Send a follow-up thank you email that captures any next steps discussed in the meeting. You will keep coming back to that email as part of follow-up accountability!

### II. Medium-term

- A. Nudge if you don't hear back on any next steps; consider scheduling regular follow-up meetings!

### III. Long-term

- A. If you're not making the progress you want, consider going higher-up the decision-making tree, in that office or (better idea, in my opinion) influencing them via others with whom they have a relationship. This could be other offices, other partners/stakeholders, using media, etc.

## Asks

### A few ideas about the most important part of federal advocacy meetings with Congress specifically

#### I. Be clear and concise in your asks

- A. Federal reps are overstretched and see their time as precious. They work long hours and have competing priorities. Help them maximize their time with you, particularly around solutions. They will appreciate this greatly.

#### II. Give them "cover" with smart messaging

- A. Even members whose values align with yours and champion your cause have a LOT of people to answer to. They need justification to act and you want to give them that cover and justification.
- B. Put differently, asking them to send a tweet, denounce some statement, support a bill, write a letter out of the goodness of their



heart only sometimes works. Most often, they need to be convinced that it is a “safe and smart thing” to do that will be a good look for them.

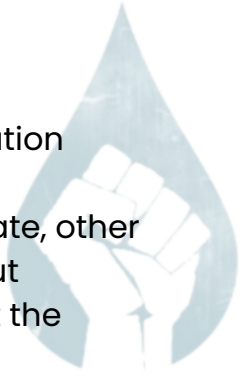
- C. For example, imagine an average democrat who cares about the environment, but has some farmers wary of EPA in their district or a medium-sized city with some big real estate developers. You have to pitch them in a way where doing what you want outweighs any flak they may get from those opposed. You can do that through smart messaging, or through getting them to hear the same thing from MANY people, or both.

### III. Be personal and passionate

- A. Use your voice, share your story. Federal representatives mostly find themselves in “stuffy” meetings and working with big or national organizations. Meeting with you is an opportunity to understand community impacts and put a face to how what they do matters on the ground. That alone can sometimes cause staff to take action for you, and can help an office be invested in your proposed solutions.

### IV. Asks can take many forms

- A. Some asks are easy for the office, others are hard. If you are building a relationship, consider an “easier” ask just to get them (the staffer and the office) on good terms with you!
- B. Most fly-ins boil asks down to “support this bill” or “oppose this bill.” This can be fine if done strategically. But, here is a list of some other things you can ask an office to do. The list is not exhaustive, but you can be a little creative.
  1. Support or oppose a bill/regulation, or support it but voice a need for a certain change
  2. Publicly support or oppose a bill/regulation (i.e. talk about it on the floor of Congress, on a TV show, in a tweet, in a press release, in more than one language, etc.)
  3. Quietly support or oppose a bill/regulation (i.e. without fanfare)
  4. Raise awareness about an issue or specific incident using their communications platforms
  5. If in your state/district, attend your organization’s events or send a staffer to an event

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- A light blue graphic of a water drop containing a white fist icon, positioned in the upper right corner of the page.
6. Release a statement or letter on a bill/issue/regulation together with other members. This could be other committee members, other members from one state, other members from a Caucus (like the “Get the Lead Out Caucus,” for example), directed at an agency or at the general public
  7. Ask the member to speak at an in-person or virtual event, or ask the member to in person or virtually meet with more constituents about an issue
  8. Ask the office to write an op-ed in local media, national media, or an online website/blog expressing whatever you want them to express that they agree with