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Advancing Mission During the August Recess

Representatives and Senators will be on recess and away from Washington, DC, until after Labor Day. Most go back to their districts and states for much of the time. Nonprofit missions won't be on hiatus in August, however, and public policy needs will continue even while lawmakers are taking a break from hands-on legislating. There's an opportunity waiting to be seized: Meet with your elected officials in the coming weeks – while they are home!

So, HOW do you meet with them and WHAT should you talk about? We're so glad you asked.

The HOW is pretty easy

Here are some simple, tried-and-true tips for how to engage with federal and state Representatives and Senators when they aren't at the capitols doing what they were elected to do.

- **Schedule a sit down.** Reach out to the elected official's local office to schedule a meeting. You can bring colleagues and clients from your own

organization and/or leaders from other charitable nonprofits to advance a policy perspective.

- **Make it a field trip:** Better yet, invite the official to your facilities to showcase your mission and how you fulfill it. You don't have to have a brand-new building or beautiful view. The point is to get the elected folks out into the real world, the world you are working to improve.

Insider's Tip: You are almost certain to get a positive response from the elected official's staff when you issue the invitation. The reason is that they need to fill their bosses' time during the recess. The staffers will admit privately that any time not filled with in-office or site visits leaves more time for the official to come up with not-so-well-thought-out ideas that staff must scramble to dissuade (or worse, fix)!

- **Put the officials to work, literally.** People who face voters need opportunities to interact with the public, so leverage their wants with your needs. As in, provide the elected officials with volunteer opportunities. Have a chili cookoff fundraiser this month? Need ushers and volunteers to work the Shakespeare in the Park performance? You see where we're going? If you can connect volunteerism, a crowd, and a photo-op, you have the makings of a great August Recess engagement.
- **"Gamify" the August Recess experience.** We know national organizations that incentivize their local operations to compete for prizes like Best Photo Contest and Largest Attendance at an event with an elected official. Never underestimate the power of competition among friends as a motivating factor.

The WHAT is pretty clear too

If you've never met with your Representative or Senator, the meeting topic can be as simple as introducing your organization, telling who and how you serve, sharing stories of impact, and basically explaining why you do what you do. A seasoned lobbyist taught us a valuable advocacy lesson worth sharing here: "You never want

to have to ask a stranger for a favor ... so get on out there and make a friend” of your elected official. Recess meetings are perfect times for this kind of relationship building.

Also, this August 2024, nonprofits are facing workforce shortages, decreased charitable giving, government grants that don't cover costs, and increased demands for services with direct impact on the communities they serve. Thanks to advocacy efforts involving direct lobbying, grassroots action, and coordinated communications, there are bipartisan bills pending in Congress designed to overcome these challenges and more. It is essential that Senators and Representatives hear from nonprofit staff and board members about the urgent needs in communities and how proposed legislative solutions deserve their attention. Here are some important bills worth promoting:

- [The Charitable Act \(S. 566/H.R. 3435\)](#)
- [Streamlining Federal Grants Act \(S. 2286/H.R. 5934\)](#)
- [Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act of 2023 \(H.R. 3032/S. 3020\)](#)

And it's always a good idea to remind elected officials that charitable nonprofits are [nonpartisan in law, fact, and purpose](#).

Here's one more reminder. They represent you. It's their job to meet you, listen to you, and take action in support of the public good. If they don't hear from you, they won't learn of your mission, passion, and impact. But they will hear about someone else's.

Good luck. Your mission is counting on you!