



**NEIGHBOR to NEIGHBOR
Visits with Congress in home districts,
March 26-April 11, 2010**

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What are Neighbor-to-Neighbor Meetings?

Establishing close relationships with your members of congress is crucial to enacting humane immigration reform.

Purpose of Neighbor to Neighbor In-District Meetings:

1. To understand where the member stands on the issue.
2. To understand that member's interests.
3. To (hopefully) get a commitment of support for our issue.
4. To build relationships between our people and public officials and institutions influencing our community.
5. To put our faith into action in public arenas.

Because the process of change takes time, lobby visits should be viewed as a part of a larger process. We need to gather information, build power, and continually get better at what we do and how we do it.

Theological Grounding:

Our hospitality for our newly arrived neighbors is supported by the sacred texts of all faiths, and is rooted in the inherent integrity and humans rights of all individuals. Please feel free to integrate them into the content of your visits or to use them as a reflection as to why this work with and for our immigrant neighbors is so important.

- For Christians, Jesus teaches that in welcoming the sojourner, we welcome Jesus himself. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). The ethic between neighbors that Jesus models and teaches for all of his followers to exemplify is found in the Good Samaritan story, when he defines who the good neighbor is as "the one who showed mercy" (Luke 10:37).
- The Hebrew bible teaches that "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34).
- In Islam, care for the neighbor is affirmed in teachings to "seek for mankind that of which you are desirous for yourself, that you may be a believer; treat well as a neighbor the one who lives near you" (Sunnah).

Preparing for your Neighbor to Neighbor Visit

B e f o r e y o u m e e t w i t h a M e m b e r

Have a plan

Before you enter into a lobby visit *always* meet before hand and assign roles! Roles should include who will *credential* the group, who will take lead on each issue, who will make *the ask* and who will jump in if someone decides to lobby on an issue the group had not agreed to upfront.

The Credential

This is who you are and *who you represent!* You are more than ‘a constituent’. You are a constituent who represents other constituents back home and you’ll report back to them. Remember, politicians pay attention to numbers.

Team Work

It is important to follow the plan you set during the pre-meeting. Of course you’ll need to be flexible, but also have someone who’s prepared to redirect the conversation back to what your group wants to say.

The Ask

Why just tell them what you want – *Ask* if they’ll support you! “Can we count on the Senator’s support on this measure?” Listen carefully and ask for clarification if what they say is vague.

Planning your Neighbor to Neighbor Meeting, Step by Step

- 1.) **Find out who represents you in Congress.** Go to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to find out who your Senators and Representatives are.
- 2.) **Know your audience.** Find out how your Senators and Representative vote on immigration. Their websites and a “Google” search will show how they vote and what they have said about immigration.
- 3.) **Gathering a group together.** There are a couple of ways you can be strategic on this: either do a meeting with members of your faith community alone, or work with other faith groups in the District your Member of Congress represents. Include others who are in direct relationship with immigrant neighbors, so that they can share their stories, and show how our broken immigration system impacts your neighbors. Aim for 5-10 participants for a visit, though a larger group can be a powerful sign of support for the issue. If you do consider a bringing a larger group, check with your representative’s scheduler to see how many people their offices can accommodate, and be sure your meeting is well-planned so that you are focused on your message, and everyone knows his or her specific role in delivering that message.
- 4.) **Schedule a meeting.** Call, email or fax the local offices of your Senators and Representatives to request a meeting. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with a staffer who works on immigration issues.
- 5.) **Prepping your meeting.** You should prepare ahead of time how you would like the meeting to go. Basically, you want to tell the story of why you care about immigration policies (this could also include the story of an immigrant in your community who is suffering due to our broken system) *and why the need for reform is urgent*. In order to show the broad movement of faith communities supporting comprehensive immigration reform, consider bringing the [Interfaith Statement on Immigration Reform](#). Finally, ask the member for their commitment to help pass immigration reform and ask how you can best support them in achieving that goal.
- 6.) **Debriefing your meeting.** It’s important to make sure you and your group are on the same page immediately after leaving the meeting, while the conversation is fresh in your mind. As a group, review: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? It’s also important to evaluate your group’s work. How did we do? As a team? As individuals?
- 7.) **Follow up with your Member of Congress.** Send the staff you met an email thanking them for their time, attaching any documents you mentioned, and once again making your case for humane and equitable immigration reform.
- 8.) **Call Washington, DC.** The Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121 can connect you to the DC offices of your Senators and Representatives. Introduce yourself as a constituent and ask for the staffer who works on immigration. Tell them about your meeting with their local office, ask what they are doing to champion immigration reform, and urge them to support humane immigration policies.
- 9.) **Let us know how your visit went.** It’s helpful for us to know how your Members explain their positions on immigration reform to you, their constituents. After you meet or speak with someone from your Senators’ and Representatives’ offices, please fill out [a Meeting Report Form \(p. 9\)](#) and send it to Yvette Schock at yschock@churchworldservice.org. Advocates in Washington can then follow up with the staff members on Capitol Hill to reinforce your visit.

Messaging: What to say to your Senators and Representatives

Below is a suggested framework for your visits, but feel free to adapt this as it makes the most sense for your group and the member you'll be visiting.

1. People of faith throughout _____ (town/city/state) are firmly committed to acting out our faith by being good neighbors to immigrant families.
 - We do this by _____ (Include here a story of the work you or other faith groups in your community have done in support of immigrants – anything from ESL classes, to advocacy, to other ministries).
2. We count you, Congressman/woman _____, as our neighbor, too.
 - We commend you for demonstrating the hospitality of our community by _____ (Find some comments or legislation the member has worked on in support of immigrant and/or refugee communities).
 - We look forward to supporting you in carrying out this important work in the weeks and months to come.
3. We'd also like to ask how you plan to be a good neighbor to immigrant workers and families by supporting and helping enact immigration reform as quickly as possible.
4. We believe that in order to truly be good neighbors to immigrants living and working in our communities, we must recognize the contributions and value they bring. We believe that the essential principles for immigration reform that accomplishes this are:
 - 1) **Path to Citizenship** – This would allow immigrant workers and families who already contribute to our community to fully participate in our society and give them the same rights that we enjoy.
 - 2) **Family Unity** – Family unity has always been a foundation of our society and our immigration policy, but is now threatened due to excessive family backlogs and immigration raids that tear families apart.
 - 3) **Worker's Rights** – We must raise the bar for all workers, immigrant and native born, and ensure that immigration status is not a mechanism to exploit the most vulnerable workers.
5. Can we count on you to support for these principles and a timely introduction and enactment of immigration reform?
6. Thank you for your time and efforts.
 - Tell them about an event you are holding or an ongoing event with the immigrant community, such as ESL courses or community event. Can we count on your attendance or visit to our congregation to talk about the importance of immigration reform?

In the meantime, please let us know how we can be a support to you as we all come together in _____ (town/city/state) be good neighbors and a welcoming community.

Neighbor to Neighbor Visits – Tips for Getting into the Media

Lobby Visits & the Media

Lobby visits provide an opportunity for groups and constituents to advocate directly to Members of Congress and can be an effective tool to increase issue awareness and urge specific Members to take action.

You can expand the impact of your Congressional visit by working to get your story covered by the media. Members of Congress rely heavily on the opinions of constituents, especially when they are vocal about what they support, and Members base many of their decisions on how issues are being discussed in their local and regional newspapers and television stations. These Members and their staff read a digest of press clippings every morning.

Positive news coverage about the lobby visit and Member of Congress in a local paper can go a long way when advocating for the immigration issue. A successful lobby visit will create a connection between your organization and the Member, as well as leading news outlets or blogs covering the story to use the same messaging you laid out during the meeting.

It might be hard to believe, but Members of Congress --especially Members of the House of Representatives -- often have a hard time generating print coverage on a regular basis. Press coverage showing the elected representative connecting to and listening to the concerns of their constituents is coveted.

Details to consider

On one hand, press coverage can be a draw for the legislator and raise the profile of your work. On the other hand, your legislator may not want the publicity. If the office is friendly and already an immigration reform supporter, they can be thanked publicly for their leadership and asked to do more. If the office is on the fence, it may be worth **contacting the legislator's press aide to ask how you can help**—from attracting press attendance to writing a simple article in your newsletter. With a hostile office, you will likely not have cooperation and should definitely consider reaching out to the media yourself, or with the help of Faith in Public Life (kwilliams@faithinpubliclife.org).

An office on the fence can be educated about the issue with compelling personal stories and facts giving them the cover to support your issue. A hostile office can be reminded that they have constituents who hold contrary positions, and/or will be hurt by the policies (i.e., put a human face on the issue).

If you're holding an event at the legislator's office (like a prayer vigil in front of the office building), you'll want to alert the media (reporters and TV stations) with a media advisory, advising them of the logistical details of the event and providing a little bit of context. If the event is not public (i.e. a meeting with staff members), you will want to send out a press release right after the meeting, letting the media know what happened and making your strongest spokespeople available for interviews.

5 Things You Can Do To Get Your Neighbor To Neighbor Visit Covered by the Local Media

1. **Write a press release announcing the meeting** – This can spur media interest on your issue and generate calls from the press to your organization and to the Member. See below a sample Press Release you can adapt. Kristin Williams at Faith in Public Life can help you write a press release and distribute it to local media: kwilliams@faithinpubliclife.org. You should send this out as soon after the meeting as possible, so it should be drafted and edited beforehand
2. **Letter to the Editor** – Write and submit a short letter to the editor of your newspaper about your meeting. Remember to keep it short – most papers will only publish brief letters, usually 150 words or less.
3. **Write a Blog** – Getting your story out to blogs can be a great way to get attention to your work. Write up the story of your visit in a blog post and check around to see if there are local blogs where you can post it. Also, the Interfaith Immigration Coalition can help you get your story placed at a national pro-migrant blog. Send your post to Allison Johnson, ajohnson@sojo.net if you are interested in publicizing your visit that way.
4. **Capture the event** – Even if you don't invite the media, you'll want to take lots of pictures and take notes on the legislator's remarks and requests for follow-up. These events can make great material for your newsletter or website and can be content for a post-meeting press release.
5. **Show the Member your reach in the media** – Send any news clippings or newsletters to your Congress Member's local offices by email or fax. Press coverage demonstrates your organization's reach within the community.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

CONTACT: Name, Email Address, Cell Phone Number

[CITY] Faith Leaders Call on Representative [REP. NAME] to Support Immigrant Families

Meet With Rep. [REP. NAME's] Office to Urge Support for Just, Humane Immigration Reform

[CITY, STATE] – Today, [CITY] faith and community leaders met with the staff of Representative [REP. NAME] to discuss the need for humane treatment of all immigrant families and comprehensive, practical reform of our broken immigration system. Leaders urged [REP. NAME] to work towards a common-sense solution that creates a path to citizenship, keeps immigrant families together and improves workers' rights.

The group is part of a nationwide movement of faith leaders mobilizing to pass comprehensive immigration reform this year.

“Across our diverse faith traditions, all our scriptures include a call to love our neighbors as ourselves and to treat our immigrant brothers and sisters with dignity,” said [SPOKESPERSON]. “We see our neighbors and members of our congregation suffering due to our broken immigration system, and we can't be silent.”

[ENTER SPECIFIC MEETING AGENDA TALKING POINTS]

“The meeting at [REP. NAME] staff office was very promising,” said [LOCAL SPOKSEPERSON]. “We look forward to working with [REP. NAME] as [HE/SHE] continues to demonstrate the moral courage needed to support immigration reform that respects the dignity of all people and will ultimately benefit our entire [community/state/country].”

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Meeting Report Form

PLEASE FILL OUT A SEPARATE FORM FOR EACH MEMBER YOU VISIT.

Your name: _____ Member of Congress: _____

Name of Congressional staff you met with at this meeting:

Names of those who attended the meeting and organization:

Topics discussed (please check those which apply):

_____ Reunification of families

_____ Pathway to citizenship

_____ Workers' Rights

_____ Other _____

The Member's position on these principles for comprehensive immigration reform:

Pathway to citizenship:

Reunification of families:

Workers' Rights:

Other:

What is your next step in building your relationship with and/or lobbying this Member of Congress?

Is there anything we can do to help you with this work?

Please return form to: Yschock@churchworldservice.org.

THANK YOU!