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MEETING AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Newly elected Members of Congress and their staff have a steep learning curve when they take office on Capitol Hill. They come from all over the country, with different backgrounds and life experiences. Some have spent years working or traveling abroad and have a solid grasp on the importance of U.S. global leadership. Others come with less experience and must learn on-the-job. **The role of CARE advocates is to help Congressional members and staff understand the importance of U.S. leadership on global issues,** including ending poverty, defeating COVID-19, and empowering the most marginalized people.

“I was very nervous to meet my Congressman before that first advocacy meeting. Four years later, I realize how empowering that moment was.”

**— Tina Hanson, CARE advocate,
California**

Why Relationships Matter

Members of Congress respect CARE and its extensive network of advocates as leaders in the fight to end global poverty and achieve social justice. They respect CARE's success working with women to help them improve their lives, their family's lives, and the health and security of entire communities worldwide.

CARE's success achieving policy reform comes from the hard work of advocates who inform decision-makers on the global issues that demand action. **Members of Congress and their staff are eager to hear from constituents** about CARE's work in disaster response, gender empowerment, global health, food and nutrition security, education, and more.

“I’ve learned that advocacy is powerful and that our representatives listen to our opinions and depend on them to influence their decisions.”

— Michael Peirce, CARE advocate, Maine



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Getting to Know Your Member of Congress

Learning more about who represents you is easy and can be done all from home. Before you reach out and schedule your first meeting with your member of Congress or their staff, do your homework and get to know them.

- **Visit the official website of your Members of Congress** or find them on [house.gov](https://www.house.gov) and [senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov). Read about their background and interests, like where they attended school, previous roles or offices held, and what they like to do in their off-hours. Consider researching what their spouse or family members are involved in, too.
- **Follow your Members of Congress on social media** wherever they have a presence: Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Monitor their feeds for what they're working on or opportunities for you to connect with them.
- **Find their local offices listed on the official website of your Members of Congress.** While all members have offices in Washington, D.C., they also have district offices in the state or district they represent to be closer to their constituents.
- **Research the committees or subcommittees they sit on.** Committee assignments provide a glimpse into the issue areas your member is most interested in, including global poverty, health, or gender issues. Committee assignments can be found on the members' official website.

Three Steps for Mapping Your Member of Congress

Once you've done your research, **you can begin to connect the dots between your members' background and interests and CARE's critical advocacy work around the world.** Your [Regional Advocacy Manager](#) can also support you in mapping these connections.

1. **Create a power map of your Member of Congress** to consolidate what you know about them and to discover who or what may influence them, like thought leaders, business or associations, and religious leader. [Download this power mapping exercise to guide you.](#)
2. **Send newly elected Members of Congress a letter** introducing yourself as their constituent and an advocate for CARE and its issues. [Download a sample letter here.](#)
3. **Connect with folks in your community who may be connected to your member of Congress** and ask questions. Who does our member of Congress listen to? Are there groups he/she likes to do events with? Are there staffers in his/her office who might be interested in our issues?

Building Relationships Early

CARE's name means something on Capitol Hill and by starting relationships early in their tenure, freshman members of Congress come to trust and rely on CARE advocates.

“[Advocates] really do make an impact. You really do bring energy to this work. You remind us, who've been working on these issues for a long time, that the fight is not over, it just continues.”

— Nita Lowey, U.S. Representative (NY-17)

CARE encourages advocates to set up meetings with new Members of Congress and their staff **as soon as possible after the beginning of Congress' new session in January.** Introduce yourself and your relationship with CARE — why do you advocate with CARE and what issues do you care about most? **Briefly explain CARE's history and mission around the world to eradicate poverty and achieve social justice.** Begin to cultivate your members' support on these issues and offer yourself as a resource to your member and their staff when they want to learn more about the most marginalized communities globally and what action must be taken to protect them.

It's important to remember that even if your Members of Congress aren't currently engaged in global poverty issues, you have the opportunity to educate them and pique their interest in these issues.

Your [Regional Advocacy Manager](#) can help you get started building your relationships by providing:

- Background information on your members of Congress



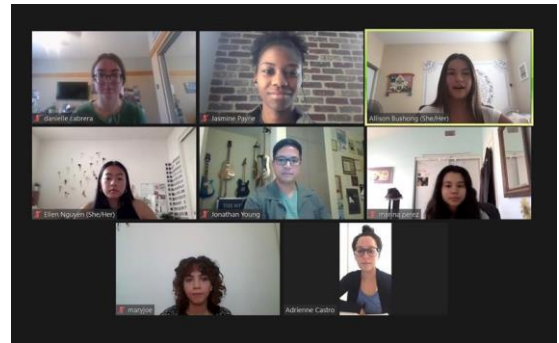
WATCH: In the U.S. and around the world, CARE works to empower women and girls, defeat poverty, and achieve racial and social justice.

- Relevant information on advocacy issues
- Assistance in scheduling meetings with members and setting an agenda

Join Us: CARE Virtual Lobby Day

In the face of COVID-19, CARE advocates are still finding opportunities to connect with and build relationships with members of Congress. Join us on March 9, 2020 to introduce yourself and CARE's policy priorities to new and returning elected officials.

[Register Here!](#)



When you're ready to establish a relationship with your Member of Congress and their staff, keep these tips in mind!

- **Be concise!** Communications are most effective when someone can quickly understand the issue and your position. This is important because it is likely that you will have limited time to convince a legislator or staff member of your views. Effective advocacy is based on communication that is simple, polite and to the point.
- **Be authentic and accurate.** Relate global issues to things that happen in your district or tell a compelling personal story that illustrates why you are advocating for the issue. When researching CARE's priority issues, ask yourself how the issues will affect your district or state? Does the policy make sense to me? Can voting in favor of my issue politically help or hurt the legislator?
- **Timing matters.** Timing your advocacy is a crucial part of being an effective advocate. Unfortunately, it's not always possible to know months or even weeks beforehand when you need to address legislators on important global poverty policies. CARE's Regional Advocacy Managers closely monitor these situations, and as soon as an issue arises that requires immediate action, they will let you know. If you have been building a relationship with a member, your advocacy during these critical times goes much farther.
- **Try different forms of communication.** While face-to-face meetings are generally most effective, they are not recommended during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phone calls can be just as effective in reaching members of Congress. Writing personalized letters by email is another important way of communicating. You can always contact your members of Congress via the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or by email at their official website. Always identify yourself as a constituent right away. Be sure to include your email and mailing address in any form of correspondence so they know how to reach you.



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By reaching out to your Member of Congress and their staff early and checking back in with them regularly, CARE and our advocates become valued allies, influential educators and trusted friends who help Congress shape a healthier, more just future for the U.S. and the world.