

Candidate engagement, birddogging tips, and “On the Record” questions

During election season, candidates are eager to listen to constituents. These voters will go to the polls soon to decide candidates’ fate during the elections. Many candidates hold townhalls (in-person and virtual). At these townhalls, the candidates meet with groups to connect with as many voters as possible. This is an excellent moment to show up powerfully as an anti-poverty advocate. At townhalls, you can make meeting requests and educate the public on our issues. This document will help you engage with political candidates so that they champion anti-poverty policies. Below, there are tips on how to “birddog” a candidate. Birddogging is a way of asking questions of candidates, so they say their stance on an issue publicly. There are examples below of “on the record” questions. These are questions you can ask that will help you birddog.

Connect with candidates to educate and build relationships

1. **Look up your candidates** on [the RESULTS candidate look-up link](#). Do a little research on them (candidate’s website, [our scorecard](#) if they are an incumbent, social media).
2. **Visit congressional calendars** ([www.house.gov](#) and [www.senate.gov](#)) to find out when your legislators are home for “District Work Periods.”
3. **Subscribe to email newsletters** of your elected officials and candidates.
4. **Call local campaign and district offices** and ask about townhall meetings and forums. Also, ask to schedule a time to meet with your group.
5. **Check your local papers, local TV stations, and social media** to stay informed of campaign activities.

Prepare questions and materials ahead of time

1. **Start with the questions below.** Personalize them with your experience, something your community can relate to, and powerful images.
2. **Make them concise** and make sure they require a yes or no answer. Use the [EPIC format](#) to help you form your questions. Ask staff for help if you need it.
3. **Check out RESULTS’ leave behinds.** Print them out and bring them to your meeting or encounter.

Work in teams

1. **Work in a group.** For online or in-person events, the more people you have, the better. Work with your RESULTS group and action network, plus use the opportunity to engage new people. If required, make sure everyone is registered for the event.
2. **Plan your engagement.** For townhall events, everyone should have the same list of questions to ask in the order you want to ask them. If a candidate fails to fully answer a question, the next person can ask for a better answer to the question and ask the next question on your list. For in-person meetings, use the [Lobby Planning Form](#) to prepare your agenda.

Essential follow-up

1. **Follow up with the candidate** after your meeting or townhall encounter. Send additional information, ask for clarification, thank them, call them into action (for example, making a public statement, add something to the platform, sign on to a letter or bill).
2. **Write about your encounter in the media.** Let the public know about your engagement with the candidate. Did the candidate commit to supporting our poverty issues? Are we still waiting to hear and want to encourage them? Are you concerned about the candidate's stance on our issues?
3. **Report your encounter** using [our Lobby Report Form](#).

Special guidance for townhalls

Plan logistics

1. **Arrive early (in-person).** Arrive early to scope out the venue for highly visible seats and procedures for asking questions. Some events will have sign-up sheets for asking questions — be sure everyone signs up. Introduce yourself to the candidate, staff, and event organizers. For online events, be ready to log on as soon as allowed.
2. **Location, location, location (in-person).** Have group members sit in different areas of the room as close to the front as possible for maximum visibility. Sit near microphones and aisles so you can be first in line when questions are allowed.

Get picked for a question

1. **Look like a fan (in-person).** Wear campaign stickers and gear, a bright shirt, nod in agreement, make eye contact. These will increase the chances of getting called on.

2. **Be first (in-person)!** Raise your hand first, fast, and high, even before they ask for hands (anticipate). Keep your hand up! For online events, get in the queue or submit questions as soon as possible. Be prepared to quickly copy and paste your question.

Stay polite and on message

1. **Impact.** Decide if you identify as a RESULTS volunteer. Getting a bunch of questions from RESULTS advocates versus everyday constituents may have less impact. If in a group, perhaps the first person identifies as part of RESULTS and the rest do not.
2. **Begin with a brief thank you** or acknowledgement, if possible.
3. **Be polite, respectful, assertive, and concise.**
4. **Remain focused and cordial** even if your question is not answered or ignored. Be firm in repeating the question and asking for an appropriate response.
5. **Don't embarrass the member of Congress/candidate.** You want a positive working relationship.

Do your follow-up

1. **Get a handshake (in-person).** Join the handshake line after events to ask a question and get a photo. Respectfully hold onto their hand until you get an answer.
2. **Seek out staff (in-person).** Introduce yourselves and your issue. Provide them with contact information and leave-behinds. Leave the event with a clear follow up plan.
3. **Find the media.** For in-person events, seek out media after the meeting to talk about our issues. For online events, write a letter to the editor thanking the candidate for publicly committing to a specific position or action.
4. **Send written follow-up.** Within a few days, email a letter to the candidate/lawmaker and the staff. Mention that you were at the event and recap your issue, question, or request. Send questions you weren't able to ask.
5. **Share your information.** Share information you learned from the gathering with your group and action network. Give them ideas on how they might follow up.
6. **Report to RESULTS staff.** Let us know what happened! How did it go and what can we learn about the member of Congress for the future? [Report online.](#)
7. **Write about your experience in the media.**

Note: For in-person events, only attend if you feel safe doing so. For online events, be sure to note instructions to join and submit questions and share with your team.

Election engagement questions

U.S. housing question

Engage: We have a huge housing crisis in our community and around the nation, and rents continue to go up.

Problem: There are at least 44 million renters in the U.S. today who struggle to stay housed because 30 percent or more of their wages go to rent.

Inform: Through the tax code we currently offer billions in tax breaks and incentives to homeowners, builders, and developers, but almost nothing for struggling renters.

Call to action: If elected, what policies would you pursue to ensure better housing affordability, especially for renters? Would you support creating a tax credit for renters with low incomes to ensure they can afford their homes?

U.S. child tax credit (CTC) question

Engage: In 2021, the expanded Child Tax Credit helped millions of families pay the bills and cut child poverty in the U.S. by nearly half.

Problem: After the expanded CTC expired, child poverty increased by 41 percent.

Inform: Earlier this year, the House passed a partial expansion of the CTC with overwhelming bipartisan support. That bill, H.R. 7024 (Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024), would help millions of children and families with low incomes. Sadly, the Senate failed to pass it.

Call to action: Tax policy will be a major focus in Congress in 2025. Would you support an expansion of the CTC to all families with low incomes in any tax code overhaul?

U.S. Farm Bill/nutrition question

Engage: Every five years, Congress must reauthorize the Farm Bill, which provides nutrition assistance to nearly 40 million Americans annually through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP reduces poverty, improves community health, and bolsters local economies.

Problem: A proposal by House Republicans would cut \$30 billion from SNAP. Any cut to the most effective defense against hunger would be devastating for many families in my community who are already struggling to put food on the table.

Inform: Since the current Congress has not been able to agree on proposals for the Farm Bill, conversations will likely continue into the next Congress.

Call to action: Would you support an equitable Farm Bill, which does not make any cuts to SNAP?

Global malnutrition question

Engage: Around the world child deaths have plummeted over the last 30 years, and the U.S. government played a huge role in this.

Problem: But every day, we're still losing more than 13,000 children under five years old. Malnutrition contributes to *half* of those deaths. This is horrific, and we have the ability to make a difference.

Inform: Two years ago, Congress passed a major bill on global malnutrition, setting up the U.S. government to help change this. It passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in both the House and Senate.

Call to action: Right now, there's a letter circulating in Congress, calling on the administration to make a bold new pledge on global malnutrition. Would you join this bipartisan effort to support better nutrition around the world?

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria question

Engage: At the height of the AIDS crisis, the world came together to fight back, pooling its resources to create the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Problem: Ending these diseases is possible, but all the new global challenges could throw us off track if we don't stay committed.

Inform: The U.S. has been a leader in supporting the Global Fund, putting in \$1 for every \$2 from others. This funding has helped save 59 million lives! And it's always been bipartisan — starting under President Bush and getting strong bipartisan support in Congress ever since.

Call to action: When the Global Fund comes to governments like the U.S. next year to pledge new funding, can we count on you to join this bipartisan coalition for strong U.S. support?

Global vaccinations question

Engage: Every year, almost five million children die before their fifth birthday, mainly of preventable causes.

Problem: For example, last year, more than 700,000 children died from pneumonia, despite the fact there are safe and vaccines around \$2 per dose.

Inform: Vaccines are one of the most cost-effective interventions to save lives and prevent illness. Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance has helped to vaccinate over one billion children, preventing more than 17.3 million child deaths since 2000.

Call to action: U.S. leadership on basic global health inspires other nations to do more for global access to life-saving vaccines. Will you please cosponsor the bipartisan resolution in support of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance? (In the Senate, it's S.Res. 684. In the House, it's H.Res. 1286.) Your support will encourage other nations to step up as well.