

Building relationships

Building relationships with our members of Congress, the media, other organizations, and our community members are the cornerstones on which the foundation of RESULTS is built. Our successes are based on the ability of our volunteers and staff to build and maintain long-term relationships with a large network of players: members of Congress, the media, other organizations, and community allies within our communities to build the political will necessary to bring about the end of poverty. RESULTS's integrity is built upon a structure of credible, timely, and accurate information presented in a non-partisan, consistent, and compelling way. Members of Congress and their aides who work with RESULTS volunteers on a consistent basis have come to rely on our information as being extremely credible no matter their political affiliation.

Aides

Building a relationship with your senators' or representatives' aides is one of the most important relationships you can develop as a volunteer. Often times it is difficult, if not impossible, to see your member of Congress in person, and completely impossible to speak to them directly on the phone, but the aide who handles the specific topic you are interested in will often have daily briefings with your member and will be able to put your issue in front of them if they are compelled to do so. Developing this relationship can be vital in turning your member of Congress into a spokesperson for the end of poverty. Get the ear of the aide and you've got the ear of the Congressperson.

Members of Congress

RESULTS volunteers across the country have had various degrees of success at developing relationships with their members of Congress. There are many variables that come into play when you begin to develop your relationship. How long your member has been in Congress and their level of seniority can affect the access you will have to your member regardless of their party affiliation. Your job is to educate, inform, and inspire them about successful programs with a proven history of results. Because of the tireless efforts of many of our volunteers over long periods of time, many Democrats and Republicans have come to believe that a vital part of their legacy will be their work to ensure the most marginalized in our communities have opportunity and access to dignified pathways out of poverty.

The media

One of the ways your congressperson gets information is through their local papers back home. A major metropolitan paper may have a circulation of 150,000 or more, so when an editor decides to run an editorial on HIV/AIDS or Head Start funding in such a paper, they are saying we support this position and we think many of our readers will too. Often editorial writers will try to sway their elected officials by calling them to action around a specific issue. RESULTS uses this platform as an effective tool for informing members of Congress about important issues around poverty. Members of Congress use their hometown papers as an effective way to measure the pulse of their constituency. Building a solid relationship with a paper can help educate, inform, and inspire your member of Congress as well members of your communities about effective tools to fight poverty. Never doubt that the media has the power to make our issues a political priority. We have the ability to educate and inspire them about the positive role they play in ending poverty.

Collaboration with others

Collaboration is a key ingredient in any social justice movement. Many organizations came together to fight for workers' rights, women's right to vote, and the civil rights movement. Without this binding of a shared vision, they would have never been able to accomplish their goals. Historically, this democracy has not embraced social justice movements and, in fact, has brutally fought to keep the status quo in place through systems of oppression. What separates democracies from dictatorships is that there is a certain breaking point where holding on to the old ideals or interests that profit only a few, will ultimately be given over to the fear politicians have of losing their seat in Congress. It sounds cynical but it's true. The ship will stay its course until a big enough wave pushes it in a different direction. One organization alone won't necessarily shift the tide, but many coming together has and will. Environmental organizations, peace groups, homeless shelters, food banks, public health specialists, TB controllers, child welfare advocates, and more — we all have a shared vision of leaving our backyard, as well as the planet, in better shape than when we found it. Networking with a wide array of people and organizations will push us all closer to seeing a world worthy of every person, not just a privileged few.

Grasstops

The former mayor of your city may not want to become a full-time RESULTS advocate but may be very willing, even energetic about lobbying your member of Congress on a specific issue that is close to their heart. Developing a network of "grasstops" or people who have political clout in your community is another way to mobilize a larger network to end

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poverty. Local business leaders, spouses of public officials, former public officials, university department heads, sports figures, and superintendents of schools are just a few of the folks who can raise the stakes when meeting with your member of Congress or the media. These are also important people to engage with for one-time actions around pieces of legislation that may be affected one way or another by your member. Never doubt what a few strategically placed phone calls from someone with political will to your member can do to affect the way your member of Congress votes. Having a network of committed citizens, organizations, and grasstops can go a long way in leveraging the political will it will ultimately take to make ending poverty a political priority.