

## RESEARCHING YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS Tools and Tips

In preparing for face-to-face meetings with your elected representatives, it pays to learn whatever you can about their backgrounds, the issues they're passionate about, and the districts they represent. You can then relate the RESULTS issues you are presenting to their life experience and interests.

1. Congressional Directory; access at the RESULTS website (<http://www.results.org>):

Join Us/Take Action Today tab, in the Key Online Tools, click on Research Members of Congress and Their Staff

- Searchable by zip code, name, or state
- Note the office addresses and phone numbers
  - You will often need to be in touch with both local and Washington offices.
- Note the Background information
  - Education, previous occupations, marital status, hometown, etc. Consider, for example, religious affiliation. Most organized religious organizations have a social justice arm that takes positions on the issues that RESULTS works on. Depending on the member of Congress and your own comfort level, you may want to research the position of the denomination and take that information with you to the meeting. Or perhaps you can make contact with local clergy who can work with you to bring the issues to the member's attention.
- Note the committee assignments
  - If you don't already know them, this is a convenient place to look them up or confirm them. Some committees are more important than others in our work, and if your member of Congress sits on a key committee, you know that influencing him or her becomes all the more important. Keep in mind that one of the key ways that members learn about issues is from each other. So if your member is not on a key committee, you can ask him or her to weigh in with colleagues who do have those assignments.
- Note the staff (**staff members** tab)
  - Note the scheduler's name. This is the person you'll talk to often in scheduling meetings with the member of Congress in Washington. If you are scheduling in the district, you are more likely to be directed to the local office number.
  - Sometimes, you'll find the names of legislative aides for various policy areas (foreign affairs, budget, taxes, agriculture, etc.). This can help you know

the specific aide you need to speak with, but if you can't find this information, just ask the person who answers at the office to direct you to the person handling the issue and they'll get you to the right person.

## 2. Members' website

- Accessed from [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) searchable by name, state, or zip code
- Every site is personalized so you'll need to learn your way around
- Expect the site to have a biographical sketch, under **Bio** or **About Charlie** or something similar
  - Do you have something in common with the member of Congress? Did he go to the same college as a member of your group? Are you from her hometown? This can give you a fun icebreaking conversation.
  - look for previous training and occupations. Is he a returned Peace Corp Volunteer? Was she a teacher? Did he serve in the military? Is she a physician? The life experiences of your member of Congress can give you an insight into how to present RESULTS requests.
  - The biography also may give you some insight into why he or she chose to run for elected office
- Expect the site to have a section on the issues
  - No member of Congress will post a position on his or her website for every issue. What this section will tell you about are the issues the member considers his or her "career issues" -- the policy areas in which he or she wants to make a difference. Your job will be connecting RESULTS' campaigns to these priorities.
- Expect the site to have a section about or for the media. It may be called **News**, **Newsroom**, **Press Center** or something similar
  - This will likely include press releases, speeches, and articles the member thinks are important. Again, these documents will give you a sense of what the member cares about. Use it to connect with them on RESULTS' campaigns.
- Expect the sites for House members to have a section describing the district
  - Are there colleges and universities in the district? What are the major businesses? Can you reach out to the leadership of these organizations to bring their influence to the table? Are there student or employee groups who would join you? You can ask these same questions for Senators - you have the whole state to work with!

- Look for the opportunity to sign up for an e-mail newsletter and follow the MOC on Twitter and Facebook.

### 3. Legislation and legislative histories, [www.congress.gov/legislation](http://www.congress.gov/legislation)

- Can search by keywords or bill number and apply filters to limit your search results
  - Look at what bills the member has sponsored (use the Sponsor filter for your member of Congress)
  - Beyond that, look at who else has co-sponsored the same bills, to identify others in Congress who have shared interests, or who have supported the work of the member in the past (use the Sponsor filter for your member of Congress, then use the co-sponsor filter to see who else in Congress has co-sponsored their legislation; and how often)

### 4. Interest group ratings

- Project VoteSmart
  - [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)
  - searchable by name or zip code
  - includes candidates as well as current office holders
- Look at the biographical information. For some members of Congress, I have found this to be the most complete source of education and previous jobs.
- Look at the interest group ratings. These are usually assessments of voting records by lobbies and special interest groups, from the National Rifle Association to the American Library Association.
- Look at the searchable database of speeches and public statements. Perhaps your member of Congress has spoken about a RESULTS issue, and you'll have a better sense of where he or she stands. More often than not, however, you won't find any comments about Head Start or SCHIP or the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria. This is still useful information, because if the member is not on record on the issue, she or he may be open to being persuaded to champion RESULTS position.

[algallaher@gmail.com](mailto:algallaher@gmail.com)

440-574-3247 (cell)

440-775-5019 (days)