

# Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement

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# Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement

Written by  
Bradford Fitch, Kathy Goldschmidt, and Nicole Folk Cooper

## Special Thanks

We are grateful to our sponsors, who have generously enabled us to produce this report. Their contributions further the important work of CMF's *Partnership for a More Perfect Union* and help promote a more effective and meaningful democratic dialogue.



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# About this Report

This report is part of CMF's Communicating with Congress project, which began in 2003 when it was clear that the Internet and email were changing the dynamic between citizens and their representatives in Congress. Since then, CMF has collected a large body of quantitative and qualitative data on citizen engagement with Congress. We have published our findings and recommendations in a series of reports on topics ranging from email overload on Capitol Hill, to congressional social media use, and how to conduct an effective meeting with a Senator, Representative, or congressional staffer. This report includes portions of that research, as well as recent unpublished survey results.

The data contained in this report is derived from nine surveys of congressional staff and four surveys of citizen advocates conducted between August 2004 and July 2016, resulting in 1,241 responses. Information about these surveys is included in the References section at the end of this report.

The congressional staff surveys were anonymous and sent to staff in targeted positions, primarily Chiefs of Staff, Legislative Directors, Communications Directors, and Legislative Assistants. House Chiefs of Staff usually represented the highest percentage of respondents. Respondents were generally balanced between Democrats and Republicans. Some surveys were fielded only to staff in the House of Representatives, and surveys fielded in both chambers generally saw a higher response rate from the House of Representatives than the Senate.

In addition to the surveys, CMF has augmented this report with qualitative and experiential data. The three authors are former congressional staffers and have been working for and closely with the Congress for a combined 70 years. During CMF's 40 years as a nonpartisan nonprofit organization serving the Congress, CMF staff and consultants have interacted with thousands of congressional staff and Members of Congress, which helped inform the findings and recommendations in this report.

# About the Authors

## Bradford Fitch

*Primary author*

Bradford Fitch is the President and CEO of CMF and has spent 30 years in Washington as a journalist, congressional aide, consultant, college instructor, Internet entrepreneur, and writer/researcher. Fitch is also the author of: *Citizen's Handbook to Influencing Elected Officials* (TheCapitol.Net, 2010); *Media Relations Handbook for Agencies, Associations, Nonprofits and Congress* (TheCapitol.Net, 2004); "Best Practices in Online Advocacy for Associations, Nonprofits, and Corporations," a chapter in *Routledge Handbook of Political Management* (Routledge, 2008); and articles on communications and advocacy. He has taught journalism and public communications at American University in Washington, D.C., where he served an adjunct Associate Professor of Communications.

Fitch began his career as a radio and television reporter in the 1980s. He began working on Capitol Hill in 1988 where he served for 13 years. He worked in a variety of positions for four Members of Congress, including: press secretary, campaign manager, legislative director, and chief of staff. From 2001 he served as Deputy Director of CMF until 2005, then rejoined CMF in 2010 as President and CEO. He co-created the Communicating with Congress project at CMF in 2003, which is the basis of this report, and has co-authored and/or edited five studies on Congress and citizen engagement while at CMF.

## Kathy Goldschmidt

*Co-author*

Kathy is the Director of Strategic Initiatives. She joined CMF in 1997 after working in the House of Representatives. Her focus at CMF has been on legislative capacity, strengthening and technology use. She has been integral to seminal CMF projects, including the Resilient Democracy Coalition and the Congress 3.0 project, which are considering different aspects of congressional capacity-building and modernization. She was co-creator and lead researcher for the Congress Online Project – through which CMF developed the Gold Mouse Awards for congressional websites and social media practices – and the National Science Foundation-funded Connecting to Congress project.

Kathy has also led a number of contracts with the Congress to develop strategies for legislative information and communications technologies. One of these was an intensive, two-year project to develop a 10-year vision and strategy for technology in the House of Representatives, on which she testified before the Committee on House Administration.

Kathy also co-created the Communicating with Congress project and has authored or contributed to dozens of research reports, publications and articles on Congress, including: *Face-to-Face with Congress: Before, During, and After Meetings with Legislators*; *#SocialCongress 2015*; *113th Congress Gold Mouse Awards: Best Practices in Online Communications on Capitol Hill*; and *Life in Congress: Job Satisfaction and Engagement of House and Senate Staff*.

## Nicole Folk Cooper

*Co-author*

Nicole Folk Cooper is the Director of Research and Publications. She joined CMF in 2001 after working in the House of Representatives and for a congressional software vendor. Nicole is the project manager for the “Life in Congress” research series that reports on the employee engagement, job satisfaction, and work-life of congressional staff and House Members. Her most recent work on this project was the publication of the “Workflex Toolkit for Congress,” a practical guide to implementing more flexible workplace policies in the House and Senate.

Nicole was the project manager and editor of the last five editions of *Setting Course: A Congressional Management Guide*, CMF’s signature publication on setting up and managing congressional offices; the *90-Day Roadmap to Setting Up a Congressional Office*; and the 2010 edition of *Keeping It Local: A Guide for Managing Congressional District & State Offices*. She is co-author and editor of *The Insider’s Guide to Research on Capitol Hill*, and the editor and project manager of the *Congressional Intern Handbook*.

Nicole also manages and contributes to the communications and technology research reports produced by CMF’s *Partnership for a More Perfect Union*, including the Communicating with Congress series, which is the basis of this report.

# Introduction

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to *petition the government for a redress of grievances*.”

—First Amendment to the United States Constitution  
[Emphasis added]

First Amendment scholars tend to focus more on the freedoms of religion, speech, and press than on the right of citizens to petition government for a redress of grievances, but that right is no less fundamental to the mechanism of our democracy. Even more than the voting booth, it is where the connection lives between citizens and those who represent them in government. However, the mechanics of the right to petition have transformed in the last three decades.

Just prior to his retirement after 37 years as “the face of small business” in Washington, D.C., Dan Danner, President of the National Federation of Independent Business, was asked how lobbying had changed most during his time in our nation’s capital. One of the biggest changes, he said, was the growth of grassroots advocacy. “Putting a real face on complicated issues,” Danner said. “Real people on Main Street saying, ‘I’m Betty’s Flowers, this is why this is important to me.’ That’s even more important now from a lobbying standpoint. To understand back home, be back home, and do things back in the districts, and let [lawmakers] know what people on Main Street back home are thinking,” he said.<sup>1</sup>

The driving catalyst for this greater focus on “real people on main street” is the Internet, which forever changed the economics of advocacy. Websites, email and social media have made it easier and cheaper for citizens to communicate to Congress. In the 1980s, if a group wanted to organize supporters to petition Congress they had to spend money on paper, postage stamps, postcards, and envelopes. Now, there are thousands of websites hosted by associations, nonprofits, and companies; all facilitating millions of communications annually to Congress ... and Congress is emailing citizens back. In practical terms, it is much less expensive today than 30 years ago to mobilize thousands of citizens to send communications

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<sup>1</sup> “Retiring NFIB chief Dan Danner on partisanship, Paul Ryan and Donald Trump,” *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2015/12/28/retiring-nfib-chief-dan-danner-on-partisanship-paul-ryan-and-donald-trump/>



to elected officials. A 2016 survey conducted by the Program for Public Consultation showed that almost half (48 percent) of registered voters had contacted a Representative or Senator within the past five years.<sup>2</sup>

This suggests that web-based email advocacy campaigns facilitated by corporations, nonprofits and associations have become the *dominant* form of democratic dialogue between Members of Congress and those they represent. Oftentimes, groups who organize citizens are portrayed as villains in our democratic process and negatively referred to as “special interest groups.” Indeed nefarious characters do exist, just as they do in every industry, but for the most part these groups are comprised of honest citizens who have joined together for a common purpose. Doctors, lawyers, students, hospice nurses, farmers, environmentalists, small business owners, morticians, seniors, insurance agents, retailers, oil company workers, and even employees of media companies have formed associations to further their common interests. They organize advocacy campaigns simply wishing to advance those interests in Congress.

*Despite the haranguing of mainstream media to the contrary, and popular culture insisting that citizen voices are muted in Washington, research conducted by the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) shows that constituents remain significant factors to legislators’ decision-making.*

As it has become easier to contact Congress the volume of email to Capitol Hill has exploded, and a growing gap has emerged between the opinions of elected officials and of citizens as to the nature and value of these interactions. For the most part, Congress values these exchanges with constituents, while citizens question whether their engagement really makes a difference. According to a July 2016 Rasmussen survey, only 11 percent of the voters surveyed thought the average Member of Congress listens to the constituents he or she represents.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as this report shows, when congressional staff were asked what advocacy factors influence an “undecided” lawmaker, 94 percent said “in-person issue visits from constituents” would have some or a lot of influence and 92 percent said “individualized email messages” from constituents would. Despite the haranguing of mainstream media to the contrary, and popular culture insisting that citizen voices are muted in Washington, research conducted by the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) shows that constituents remain *significant* factors to legislators’ decision-making.

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<sup>2</sup> Unpublished data from a June 30-July 5 phone survey of 2,411 registered voters by the Program for Public Consultation, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland.

<sup>3</sup> “What America Thinks: Can You Talk to Congress?” Rasmussen Reports, July 11, 2016. [http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public\\_content/what\\_america\\_thinks/2016\\_07/what\\_america\\_thinks\\_can\\_you\\_talk\\_to\\_congress](http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/what_america_thinks/2016_07/what_america_thinks_can_you_talk_to_congress)

Yet these encouraging findings about the constructive influence of constituents do not provide the complete picture of the citizen-Congress relationship. While the Internet has allowed millions of citizens to petition government, CMF research suggests it has not enhanced the quality of those interactions. In three surveys (2004, 2010, and 2015) CMF asked congressional staff the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement: “Email and the Internet have increased constituents’ understanding of what goes on in Washington.” While 55 percent of congressional staff agreed with this statement in 2004<sup>4</sup>, that number dropped to 31 percent in late 2015.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Congress seems to have developed a level of mistrust of the facilitated advocacy process. More than half of congressional staff (47 percent) believe that “most advocacy campaigns of identical form messages are sent without the constituent’s knowledge or approval.”<sup>6</sup> This perception among congressional staff has remained steady for a decade.

Even with this conflicting data on the frustrations with the mechanics of interacting with Congress, there is reason to believe that changing the mechanics can help restore faith in the relationship between citizens and those who represent them. As outlined in this report, CMF has observed that by diversifying their interactions, strengthening the quality of exchanges, and focusing on *relationship building* rather than transactional communications with Capitol Hill, constituents can have a measurable impact on decision-making in Congress. Hence, the subtitle of this report is, *The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement*.

The cynical view would hold that enhanced power by constituents who participate with like-minded others in organized groups (e.g., “special interests”) would skew lawmakers’ decision-making process and lead to worse policy outcomes. But in fact, congressional staff reported that they *appreciate* a well-prepared constituent, as it makes it easier to understand the implications of public policy on those they represent. Better policy decisions are made through better citizen advocacy.

Unfortunately, most Americans believe their voices don’t make a difference. This research proves that their voices *do* make a difference, and they can magnify their voices by using more effective advocacy techniques. CMF concedes that this conclusion flies in the face of conventional wisdom. However this “wisdom” is based on a mainstream media that focuses on battles between congressional leaders, scandal, and partisan infighting – ignoring the day-to-day decision-making in which Senators and Representatives engage. This report involved a much broader community of the Congress than journalists or the public regularly interact with, compiling data from hundreds of congressional offices and hundreds of staff during more than a decade.

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<sup>4</sup> *Communicating with Congress: How Capitol Hill is Coping with the Surge in Citizen Advocacy*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2005. <http://congressfoundation.org/cwc-surge>

<sup>5</sup> 2015 CMF survey of House and Senate staffers. Additional information can be found on page 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Yet this is not the first research to document the potential for strong bonds between the government and the governed. In 1978 political scientist Richard Fenno wrote a seminal work on Congress, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. For over 110 days, he traveled with 18 Members of Congress in their districts, listening to the constituents who talked to legislators, and interviewing the legislators about their views. Fenno observed the importance of the relationship between Members of Congress and their constituents, and the value legislators place on building those relationships. He also noted that relationship building was not a cavalier undertaking.

*“The more accessible they are, House members believe, the more will their constituents be encouraged to feel that they can communicate with the congressman when and if they wish...However, this kind of assurance is not obtained by one-shot offers. It is created over a long time and underwritten by trust. Access and the assurance of access, communication and the assurance of communication – these are the irreducible underpinnings of representation.”<sup>7</sup>*

While Fenno’s research is decades old, it offers timeless insight for America, which is confirmed by this report. If citizens, the organizers of grassroots campaigns, and Congress can re-learn these “irreducible underpinnings” in the age of the Internet, then perhaps part of the essential element of *trust* between citizens and Congress could be restored.

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<sup>7</sup> *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*, Richard F. Fenno, Jr., 1978.

## What Are “Decisions” by Members of Congress?

This report seeks to explain the connection between citizen engagement and legislators’ decision-making. But that begs the question: What constitutes a “decision” by a lawmaker? Most Americans view legislators’ decisions through the only lenses they have: local media, national media, and the Internet. Yet most decisions Senators and Representatives make are never examined by the public, mainstream media, or even local media. This does not mean they are made in secret. It is a matter of public record when a legislator casts a vote, cosponsors a bill, or announces a position on an issue. They make dozens if not hundreds of decisions each week, and every single one impacts *someone*, but few impact *everyone*.

The media and general public rarely have incentives to scrutinize most decisions made by legislators simply because they affect a narrow swathe of citizens. This is the very reason for organized advocacy, or “special interest” groups. It is citizens who have an *interest* or *opinion* on an issue exercising their constitutional right to assemble (often through associations, nonprofits and companies) and petition the government. In fact, most interactions between citizens and Congress are facilitated by these groups. Thousands of state and national associations, nonprofits, and companies organize Americans to contact their elected officials on issues of collective importance, most of which do not have broad national interest and are seldom discussed outside of the group’s network.

For example, the Alzheimer’s Association might call on its members to encourage a Representative to cosponsor a bill to increase funding for Alzheimer’s research. Or the American Farm Bureau might reach out to farmers to encourage a Senator to speak publicly against a proposed regulation by the Environmental Protection Agency. Unless someone subscribes to those organizations’ e-newsletters, social media, or visits their website regularly they may not learn if the lawmaker agrees or disagrees with these requests. The result is a cycle of citizen advocacy translating to congressional action playing out thousands of times a day in Congress, largely not witnessed by either the media or the public. This is not the warped influence of so-called special interest groups – it is a fundamental feature of our democracy for citizens to band together, monitor, and inform elected officials, expressing a voice on the decisions that will impact them.

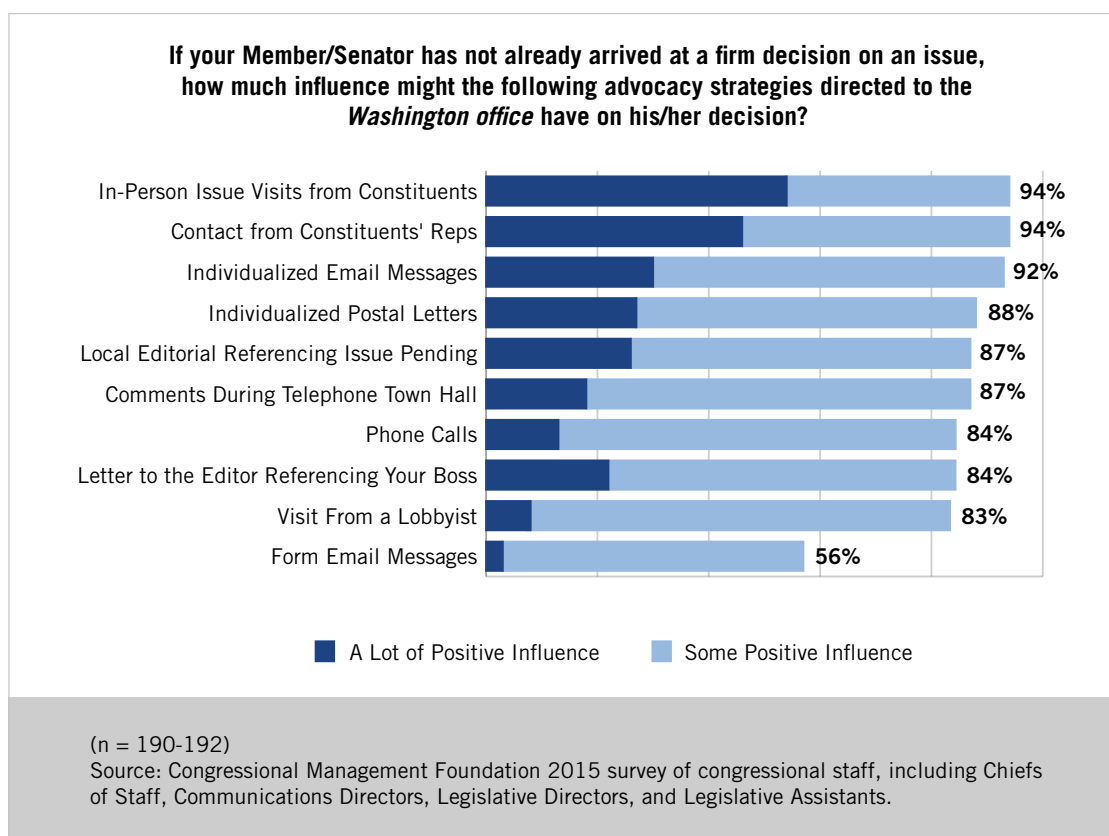
Of course Members of Congress sometimes make decisions with national and international implications, such as passage of major tax bills, restructuring entitlement programs, or authorization of military force, but they are rare.

# Findings

## 1. Direct constituent interactions have more influence on lawmakers' decisions than other advocacy strategies.

Popular opinion – heavily influenced by news coverage, commentary, and fictional accounts of Congress – is that constituents' voices do not influence legislators. CMF research indicates this view is inaccurate. Members of Congress report that “staying in touch with constituents” is the job aspect most critical to their effectiveness.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, as noted in Figure 1, 94 percent of congressional staff respondents note that “in-person visits from constituents” would have some or a lot of influence on an undecided lawmaker, a finding which has been consistent for more than a decade.

FIGURE 1.



<sup>8</sup> *Life in Congress: The Member Perspective*, A Joint Research Report by the Congressional Management Foundation and the Society for Human Resource Management, 2013. <http://congressfoundation.org/lic/member>

That these direct interactions have more influence than other advocacy strategies is also supported by qualitative evidence and hundreds of anecdotes from congressional staffers and Members of Congress that CMF has amassed over four decades of interactions. Contrary to popular opinion, Members of Congress value constituents' input, rely on constituents' views to form their decisions on public policy questions, and genuinely seek to comprehend the impact of their decisions on citizens who live in their district or state.

*“Constituents who take the time to contact our office directly – via our website or phone calls – about their concerns are given priority treatment. Their comments are recorded, and the data is shared with the entire staff for immediate action.”*

*—House Legislative Director*

## **Citizen Impact Story: A Self-Taught Citizen Advocate**

In 2011, Bob O'Hara felt like most Americans watching politics. He was frustrated and wondering what he could do about it. He attended a No Labels conference, where one presentation stuck in his head: CMF's findings from the report “Perceptions of Citizen Advocacy on Capitol Hill.” It showed that 97 percent of congressional staff surveyed felt an “in-person visit by a constituent” has some or a lot of influence on an undecided lawmaker. Bob was skeptical, but later in the day two congressional Chiefs of Staff confirmed that, yes, *constituents are central* to how Members of Congress make public policy decisions.

Armed with new-found purpose Bob set out to become a citizen-advocate. He called his Representative's district office and requested a meeting with the District Director. He was stunned to get a quick “yes” response, and eventually had a 45-minute meeting with the legislator's senior staffer in the district. Since then, Bob has had many meetings with legislators and their staffers. All he's had to do is make a request. “I couldn't believe how easy it was to get meetings,” he said.

Bob has become his own one-man-show<sup>9</sup> on the value of meetings with legislators. He continues to face skepticism from his friends, but now he's got both data and experience on his side.

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<sup>9</sup> “Bridge Alliance City Events: Bob O'Hara (No Labels),” YouTube video, 14:29, posted by “Mediators Foundation,” July 24, 2016, <https://youtu.be/8vH03yx4Qxs>.

Throughout the period of this research (2004-2016) congressional staff and Members of Congress have consistently noted the influence of constituents on decision-making:

- In a 2014 survey of Legislative Assistants, Legislative Directors, and Communications Directors, 78 percent said that social media posts directed to their office from “multiple constituents affiliated with a specific group or cause” would have “some” or “a lot” of influence if their Member was undecided on an issue.<sup>10</sup>
- In a 2013 survey of House District Directors, 95 percent said “meetings with constituents” are “somewhat” or “very” important to developing new ideas for issues and legislation.<sup>11</sup>
- In a 2011 survey of Members of the House of Representatives, Members rated “staying in touch with constituents” as being the job aspect most critical to their effectiveness, with 95 percent rating it as “very” important.<sup>12</sup>
- In 2004 and 2010 surveys of congressional staff, 99 percent (2004)<sup>13</sup> and 97 percent (2010)<sup>14</sup> said that an “in-person visit from a constituent” would have “some” or “a lot” of influence on an undecided lawmaker.

This finding should not be construed to suggest that legislators are successfully connecting with Americans in ways that adequately respond to the challenges facing our nation. Regrettably, there is ample data to suggest our nation is gridlocked on many thorny issues. And on those few high profile decisions that affect politicians' *electoral* futures or *reputations* – the decisions that make it into campaign ads and history books – many other factors are involved. But, as noted earlier, those are a tiny fraction of the decisions Senators and Representatives make.

*“Town hall meetings are probably the most directly impactful for individual constituents to communicate with the Senator and I’m not sure people typically understand the impact that their presence and comments can have.”*

—Senate Communications Director

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<sup>10</sup> #SocialCongress 2015, Congressional Management Foundation, 2015. <http://congressfoundation.org/social-congress-2015>

<sup>11</sup> 2013 CMF survey of House District Directors. Additional information can be found on page 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Life in Congress: The Member Perspective*, A Joint Research Report by the Congressional Management Foundation and the Society for Human Resource Management, 2013. <http://congressfoundation.org/lic/member>

<sup>13</sup> *Communicating with Congress: How Capitol Hill is Coping with the Surge in Citizen Advocacy*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2005. <http://congressfoundation.org/cwc-surge>

<sup>14</sup> *Communicating with Congress: Perceptions of Citizen Advocacy on Capitol Hill*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2011. <http://congressfoundation.org/cwc-perceptions>

## 2. Congress places a high value on groups and citizens who have built relationships with the legislator and staff.

Email advocacy campaigns have made it easy for citizens to contact Congress, but they have also resulted in a significant increase in the volume of communications to congressional offices. One lawmaker CMF observed experienced a 1,000 percent increase in constituent communications in less than a decade. At first, as more citizens engaged with Congress, this was seen as a victory for democracy. However, while volume continued to increase, the predominant act of “petitioning the government” has been reduced to an impersonal electronic transaction, with neither the sender (the citizen) nor the receiver (the Congress) finding the experience particularly valuable.

Congressional staff process and record large volumes of identical form emails, generate mail reports to inform the office of the constituents’ opinions, and respond to the messages. Yet, staff also consistently say these campaigns alone are not effective grassroots strategies, as they do not provide the multi-faceted and complete picture of constituent opinion and impact that legislators need to make their decisions. While high-volume email campaigns provide some sense of constituent opinion, they often lack a qualitative component that is equally if not more important for assessing public policy options.

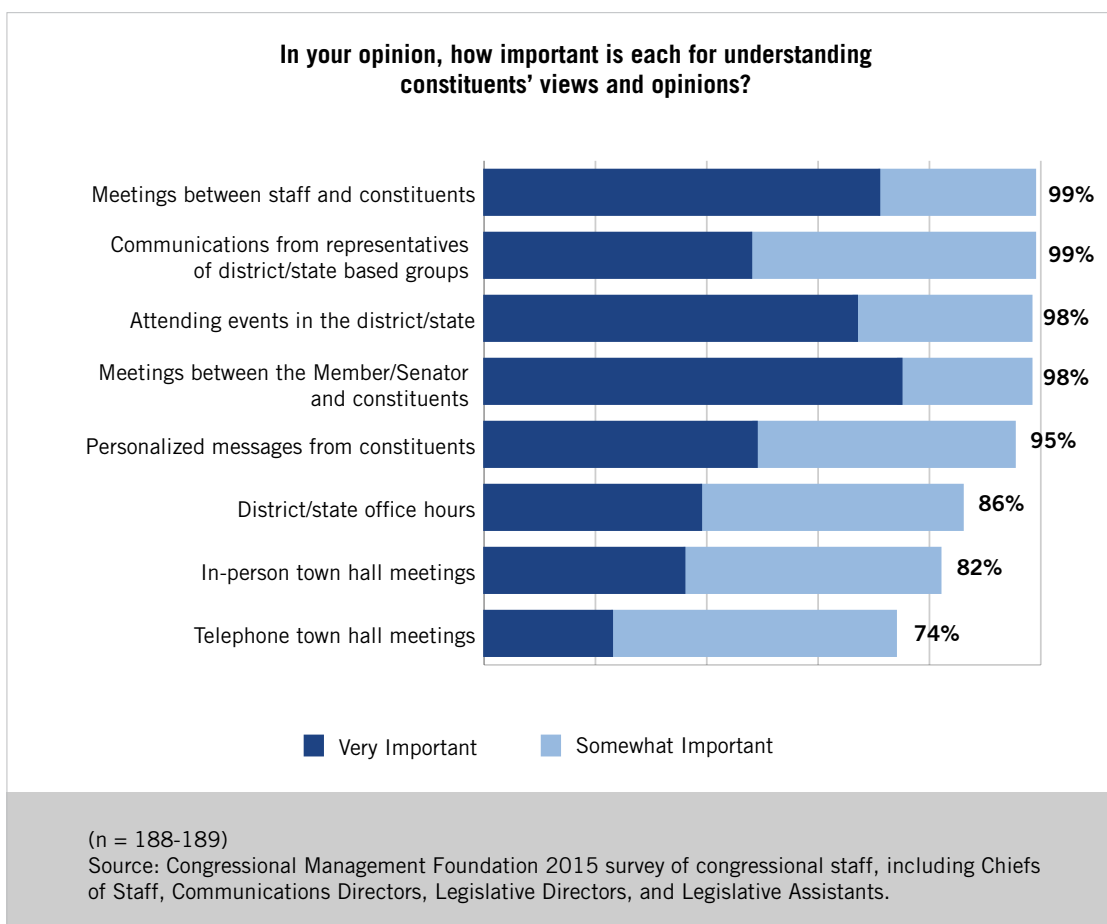
*“The increased ‘engagement’ from people who click “I agree” on emails from outside groups and flood our offices with generic emails drowns out those constituents who take the time to write in about issues they know and care about.”*

*—House Legislative Assistant*

CMF’s data suggests that broader, more dynamic, and more diverse activities, conducted over a longer period of time and resulting in relationships between constituents and congressional offices, are more successful advocacy strategies than mass form email campaigns because they provide higher-quality and more nuanced content to inform decision-making. As Figure 2 shows, staff note that in-person meetings in which legislators and staff have opportunities to interact and develop relationships with constituents are very important for understanding constituents’ views. Equally helpful is when these high-quality, in-person interactions are followed by other personalized interactions, such as messages written by constituents and communications by people who work for groups in the district or state that represent many constituents.



**FIGURE 2.**



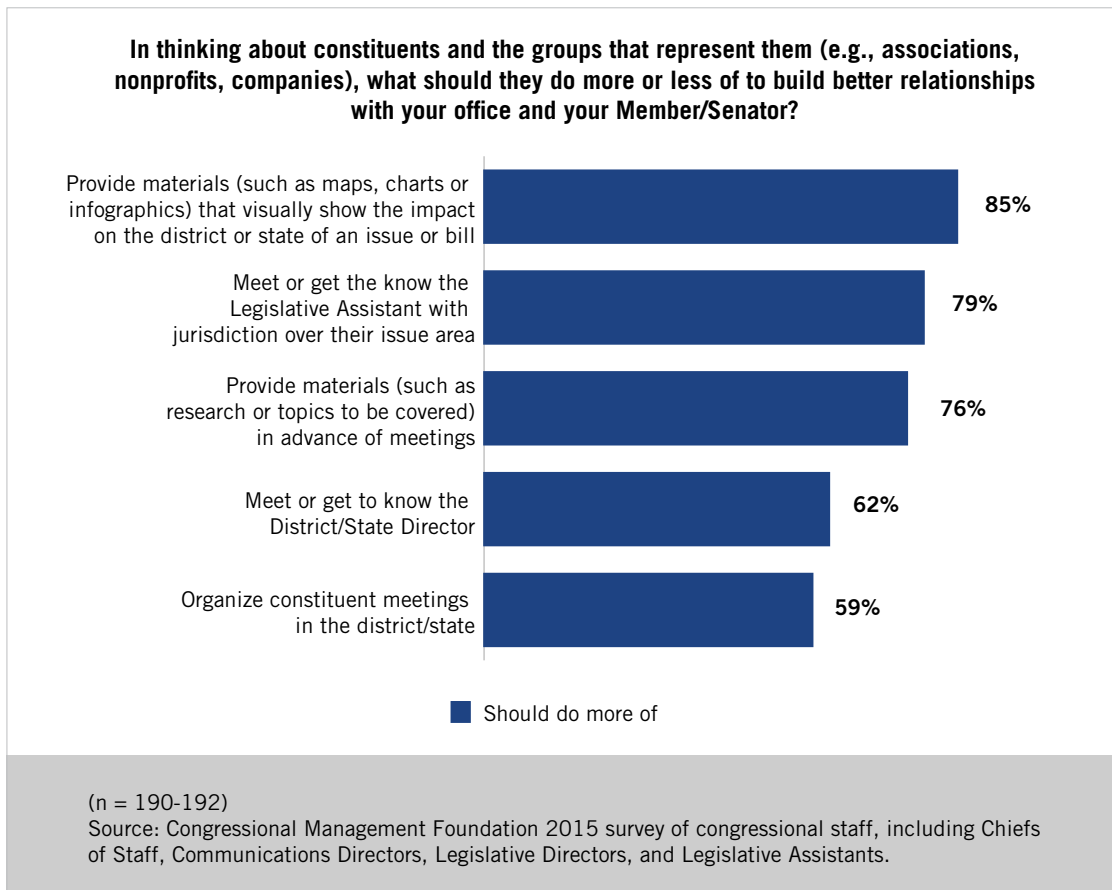
When asked what constituents and the groups that represent them should do more of to build better relationships with their office, a sizable majority of congressional staff surveyed indicated that meeting or getting to know Legislative Assistants and District/State Directors is a good idea (Figure 3). Building a relationship with congressional staff is often the first step to effective advocacy. (See the “Citizen Impact Story” on page 14 describing how one citizen got to know his state delegation.) Politicians are constantly scanning their local environment to better understand how a pending decision, bill, or issue will impact their constituents. To do that they turn to trusted citizens who have a first-hand understanding of those issues, and they often rely on their staffers in D.C. and back home to collect the information. But to earn that legislator’s trust a relationship must be established,

and that requires time and repeated interactions. This is usually accomplished by building relationships with members of the legislator's staff, regularly attending events, or communicating frequently and substantively or, ideally, all of the above.

*"In person meetings are the easiest way for staff to understand an issue because it gives us the chance to ask questions, and put a face with the issue."*

—House Deputy Chief of Staff

**FIGURE 3.**



## Citizen Impact Story: One Tweet Gets a Legislator's Attention

*(Note about this case study: CMF has chosen to withhold the names of the citizen-advocate and the legislator involved, as revealing them would possibly interfere with the relationship between them.)*

Congressional decisions affect food banks around the U.S. in a variety of ways – tax laws, incentives to give to charities, and federal programs to alleviate hunger. Among those programs that help feed needy citizens is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly known as Food Stamps). The operation of SNAP directly affects operators of food banks: if SNAP benefits are cut back then people need to rely more on private charities, including food banks.

In 2015 the House of Representatives was considering a budget that Feeding America determined would cut the SNAP program, putting further pressure on their member organizations. A senior manager for a food bank decided to put some of her advocacy academy training to the test. She knew her Member of the House, but had rarely “pressured” him on votes. Prior to the budget vote, the food bank employee put out a simple message on Twitter to her followers: contact our Representative and let him know this budget vote affects families in his district.

A few hours later the food bank's phone rang. A staffer from the Member's office, whom the employee knew, was not too pleased by this “pressure.” The senior manager explained the situation, and had subsequent conversations with other staff members. Some months later another budget vote was approaching in the House. *This time* the congressional office reached out to the senior manager before the vote. The senior manager was seen as a valued expert on hunger issues. In this case, the food bank went from being “on” the table in Washington, to “at” the table ... with one tweet.

As noted earlier, because the Internet significantly reduced the cost and labor to send mass communications to Congress it has significantly increased the *number* of citizens and groups that send these messages – but the resources available to Senators and Representatives have actually declined. (Unlike other parts of the U.S. government, Congress has actually *cut* the budgets of individual offices since 2011<sup>15</sup> and overall staff is around 1980s levels.<sup>16</sup>) In this simple supply-and-demand equation, the amount of time a legislator can spend on each group's concerns has diminished because the sheer number of groups and constituents seeking attention has significantly increased. Therefore, constituents and groups that emphasize long-term, qualitative relationships are much more likely to be sought out and listened to by decision-makers when Congress considers public policy that will impact their issues.

*“My Member does not like sitting in an office. He prefers to be out in the district meeting with constituents in their own venue. He gains insight to their issues, challenges and needs by being present on the ground.”*

*—House District Director*

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<sup>15</sup> “Managing Changes in Budgets and Benefits,” Congressional Management Foundation, 2014.  
<http://congressfoundation.org/changes-budgets-benefits>

<sup>16</sup> *Vital Statistics on Congress*, Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, 2014.  
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/vital-statistics-on-congressdata-on-the-u-s-congress-a-joint-effort-from-brookings-and-the-american-enterprise-institute/>

## What about Campaign Contributions?

When discussing what influences Members of Congress, there is one aspect not referenced in this report: campaign contributions. The media (and Hollywood) consistently suggest that the best way to influence Members of Congress is to donate to their campaigns. CMF has discussed campaign contributions in focus groups and interviews with congressional staff, but have not included them as an “influence factor” in this research for the following reasons:

1. **There is a clear line drawn between the official duties of Members of Congress and their campaign activities.** Congressional staff in Washington, D.C., and in districts and states across the country serve to fulfill the official and representational duties of their Member through policymaking and constituent services. Separate campaign offices employ staff whose jobs include political messaging, fundraising, and scheduling campaign events, such as rallies, debates, and public appearances. Congressional staff and Members strictly observe this separation, and staff on the “official” payroll can only participate in campaign activities on their own time.
2. **Most congressional staff involved in this research are not involved in the legislator’s re-election campaigns.** Most staff involved in policy decision-making do not transition to campaign work every two years, and many do not have a campaign background. This is especially true for the dominant categories of congressional staff who participated in this research (Chiefs of Staff, Legislative Directors, and Legislative Assistants).
3. **Campaign donors are usually not referenced in policy-related meetings.** In the thousands of interactions CMF has had with legislators on how they make decisions (as researchers and former congressional staff ourselves), campaign contributions rarely are referenced when Members of Congress are making policy decisions. Certainly “politics” (how voters/constituents will react) are often central to decision-making, but donors’ views are rarely raised unless they have a larger role in the community (such as a large employer).
4. **Campaign contributions are not the focus of this research.** While some evidence suggests that campaign contributions may improve access for donors, their influence on legislative outcomes is far less clear. Our research focuses on constituent engagement and public policy decision-making. Other organizations expend significant resources on the influence of money in politics, so it is not necessary for us to do so.

This is not to suggest that campaign contributions are unimportant to discussions of public policy, nor that they have no influence on Members of Congress, but that the relationship between campaign contributions and the actions of Senators and Representatives is far more complicated and nuanced than generally portrayed. There is seldom a blatant *quid pro quo*. More often, the relationship is best characterized by one House Chief of Staff’s views, expressed during a focus group. We asked: “Who has more influence: someone who gives \$1,000 to your campaign or someone who speaks at a town hall meeting?” The Chief of Staff replied (and others nodded in agreement), “That depends on who makes the best argument. We listen to both of them.” This suggests that while legislators listen to campaign contributors, they are not the only people who have the ear of Congress.

### 3. Citizen advocates are more influential and contribute to better public policy when they provide personalized and local information to Congress.

The craven (and, regrettably, prevalent) view of Congress is that the institution is filled with self-interested and corrupt politicians who care only for their own personal interests and those of their financial backers. Unfortunately, this view is sometimes advanced by Members of Congress themselves, especially during their election campaigns. In truth, CMF research and experience indicates that Congress is actually comprised of hardworking public servants who are mostly motivated by what they believe is in their constituents' best interests. To assess these best interests Congress looks to citizens to provide information on how decisions in Washington affect people back home.

Specifically, when making policy decisions, Members of Congress primarily want constituents to provide answers to four questions:

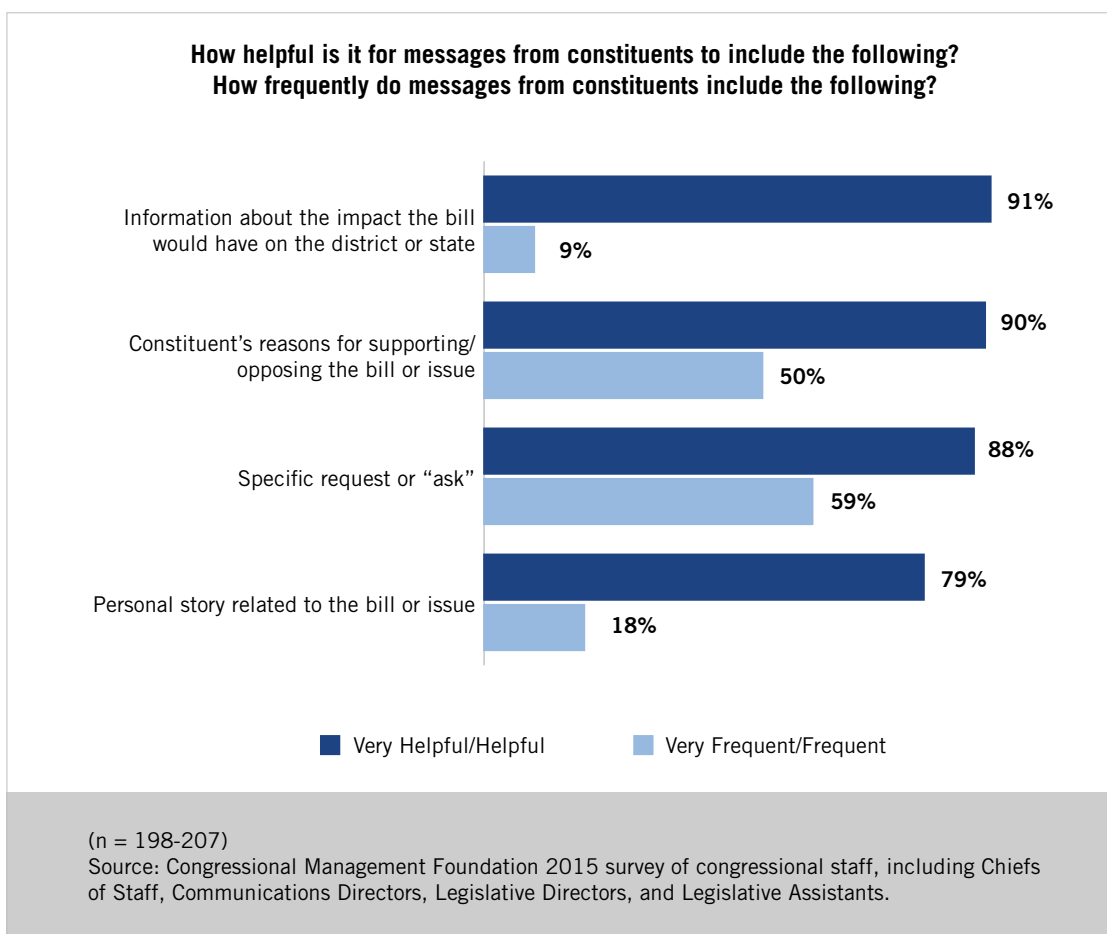
1. What actions do constituents want me to take?
2. Why do constituents want me to do that?
3. What are the current and/or potential *local* impacts?
4. What are constituents' personal stories or connections to the policy?

However, as Figure 4 shows, constituents frequently do not include the answers to these questions in their communications.

*“My boss rarely acts if there isn’t an impact on his district. Show me a connection as to how your issue directly affects our constituents. Frank discussion about political impact is always appreciated, as are district-specific data.”*

*—House Legislative Assistant*

**FIGURE 4.**



Not including this information is an extraordinary missed opportunity to inform and persuade Members of Congress. Lawmakers count on constituents to provide the human face of public policy and the direct connection between the policy and the people they represent. Congressional staff report through CMF surveys and focus groups that a range of localized information is valuable, including:

- The number of constituents affected by a particular policy decision;
- The estimated economic impact on a community;
- A story about how a constituent's life has been changed by a new law or would be changed by proposed policy.

## Citizen Impact Story: Learning How to Talk Like Your Audience

Food banks in California saw a great need, but there was concern they could “sell” a solution to a majority of their state legislature. The challenge was to frame the issue in a way that appealed to a wide swath of lawmakers, not just those normally supportive of the food bank community.

The problem: food bank clients weren’t always getting access to the fresh produce and high protein products they needed, such as milk, eggs, and meat. This is in the #1 agriculture producer in the U.S., a state with an abundance of these products. To change things, the California Association of Food Banks led a coalition of anti-hunger and health organizations to secure California’s first-ever commitment to encourage the CalFood program to use *California*-produced foods. The effort resulted in an additional \$2 million in the state budget for food banks to purchase and deliver California-grown foods, which has allowed food banks to focus on hard-to-deliver local products that are essential to healthy diets.

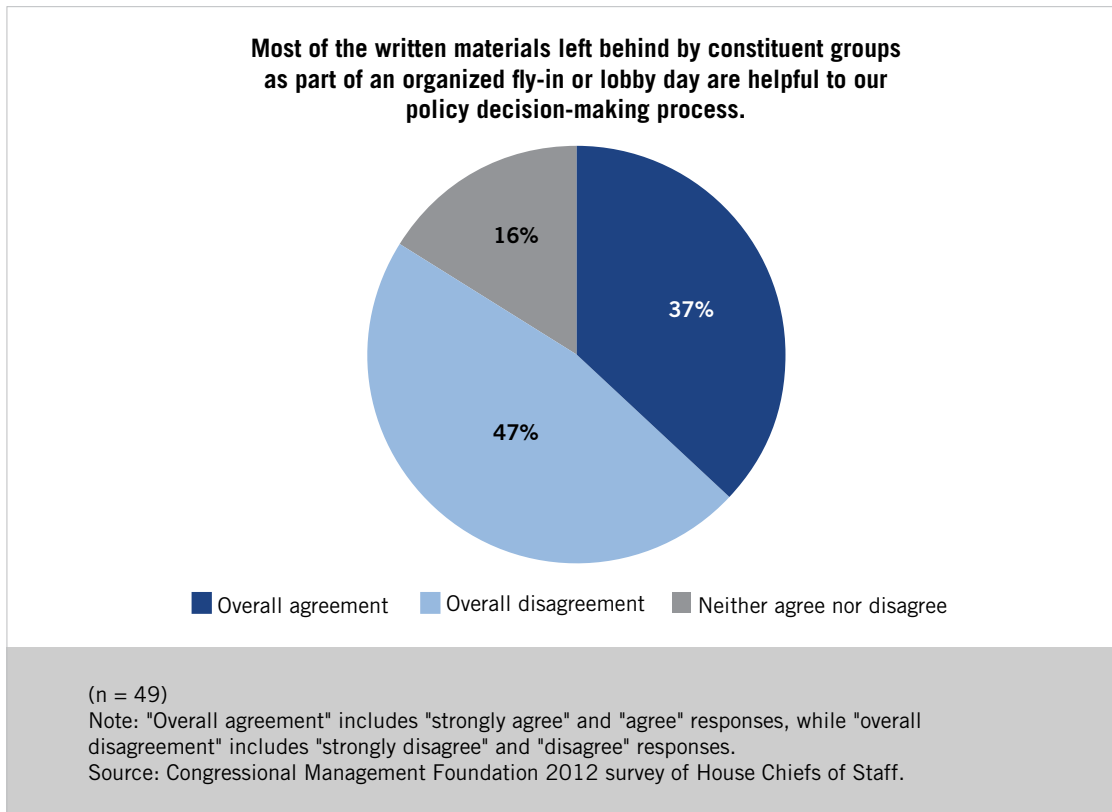
The strategy: frame the language of the “ask” in a way that appealed to both liberal and conservative lawmakers. Natalie Caples, Program Supervisor at Community Food Bank in Fresno, California, explained how she used her advocacy academy training to develop a more nuanced strategy. “The majority of our [state legislative] delegation in the Central Valley is pretty conservative,” she said. “When making appeals for the CalFood program, we focused primarily on the economic impact to California and local growers and manufacturers. Money into these local economies and providing a ‘stimulus of sorts’ that benefitted our Ag community really sold the program. What the Academy taught me was know your target audience.”

Advocacy “fly-ins” are an important intersection for data, constituents, and Congress where this type of localized information could impact Congress. Every spring, associations, nonprofits, and corporations make great efforts to bring thousands of citizens from throughout the country to Washington, D.C., to meet with their Senators and Representatives about public policy issues. When Congress is in session it is common for Members to meet with four to eight constituent groups daily. In these meetings, citizens from the legislator’s district or state usually discuss two or three issues or policies that affect them.



Typically, part of the preparation effort for a fly-in is the creation of “leave-behinds.” These materials are developed by the organization hosting the fly-in, and they are designed for attendees to hand to the legislators and staffers they meet with. However, as Figure 5 shows, only one in three House Chiefs of Staff who responded to our survey believe these leave-behinds are helpful.

**FIGURE 5.**

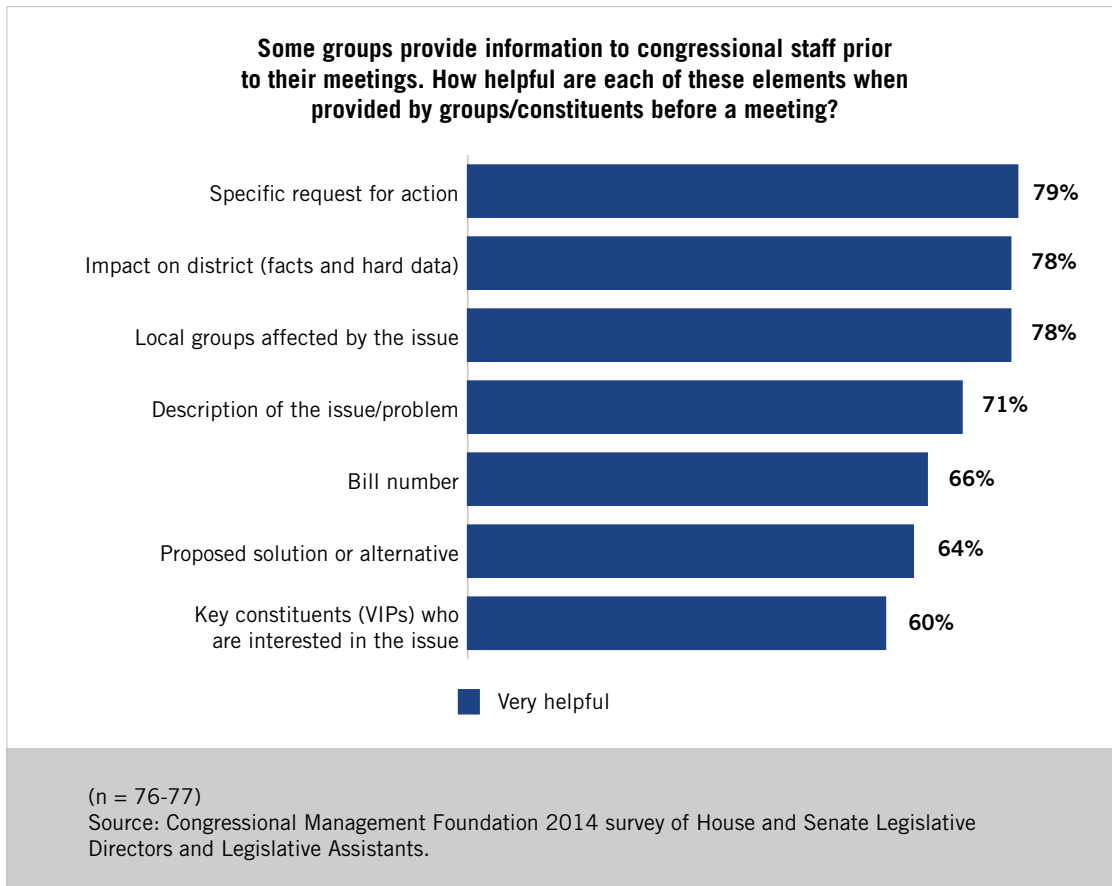


One reason these materials are viewed as unhelpful is that they are often long, dense policy briefs with details about the host organization’s positions on specific issues. This information can usually be found on the organization’s website, and, as our data shows, that is not what legislators and staff want from constituents. Fly-in organizers need to appreciate that the material delivered by citizen-advocates should be different than material delivered by professional advocates (lobbyists). Staff welcome “deep-dive” policy content from lobbyists (if it is not biased) that might examine the national implications of a bill. But they also value short one-pagers that succinctly explain the local impact of a decision. Congressional staff report they would rather constituents deliver the latter when in meetings.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Face-to-Face with Congress: Before, During, and After Meetings with Legislators*, Congressional Management Foundation, 2014. <http://congressfoundation.org/FacetoFace>

Another reason congressional staff don't find these materials helpful is because of *when* they are provided. Three-fourths (76 percent) of congressional staff surveyed think groups should more often send policy-related materials *in advance* of constituent meetings. (Think “read-ahead” not “leave-behind.”) Legislative staff usually conduct research and sometimes prepare a memo for the lawmaker prior to a meeting with constituents. Figure 6 points to what policy staff (Legislative Assistants and Legislative Directors) think would be most helpful if provided before the meeting.

**FIGURE 6.**



CMF data suggests that groups that provide this information to congressional staff in advance of a meeting are much more likely to have productive policy-related discussions because legislators and their staff have the opportunity to effectively prepare.

## How a Former Staffer's Tweets on Citizen Engagement Went Viral

While we were writing this report a former congressional staffer, Emily Ellsworth (@editoremilyle), tweeted about effectively communicating with Congress. Ellsworth spent six years working in the district offices of Representatives from Utah, and her post-2016-election tweets about how to contact Congress ignited a Twitter and media storm that garnered national attention and led to a guide called *Call the Halls: Contacting your Representative the Right Way* (\$). Her advice aligns with our findings and recommendations. Samples of her tweets from November 2016 include:

“We held town halls consistently that fewer than 50 people showed up for. And it was always the same people. So, shake it up.”

“If you run an advocacy group, invite local staffers to show up at your events. Let them talk to people you work with and set up meetings.”

“As always, please be kind but firm with those staffers. They will listen and talk to you. I always did.”

“But, ultimately, no matter what you do, if you communicate with your member of congress at all, you are ahead of most people.”

Read more about Emily's congressional experience at:  
<https://storify.com/editoremilyle/i-worked-for-congress-for-six-years>

#### **4. Citizens have significant potential to enhance their advocacy skills and influence Congress.**

To the extent that citizens are ever trained how to interact with Congress it is usually through a short speech given during their organization's policy/advocacy conference in Washington, D.C. CMF wondered what would happen if a small group of Americans were provided more purposeful and extensive training to become advanced citizen advocates. To find out, CMF and Feeding America, the largest network of food banks in the U.S., embarked on an exciting and original experiment in democracy.

Through a grant from Feeding America, CMF designed an "advanced advocacy academy." The initial program in 2015, conducted over a four-month period, provided 21 food bank representatives from throughout the country with more than 40 hours of in-person and online training, interactive exercises, homework assignments, targeted coaching, and role-playing. In 2016 a second program was conducted with an additional 23 participants.

The day after the Feeding America Advocacy Academy concluded, participants conducted advocacy meetings with congressional staff. To measure the advocates' performance CMF surveyed the staffers about the meetings. Additionally, CMF conducted before-program and after-program surveys of participants to measure changes in their self-assessment of their behavior and attitudes.

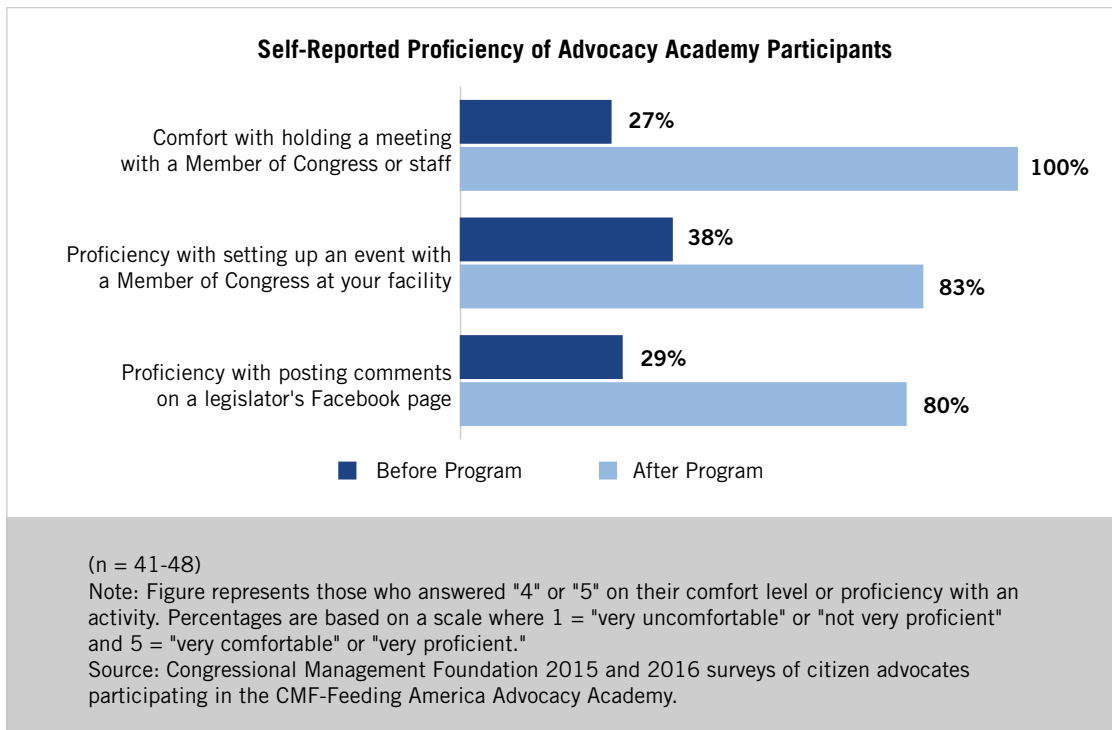
By every measurement, Advocacy Academy participants emerged from the program significantly better advocates to Congress (see Figure 7). Participants reported a greater comfort level with meeting with a Member of Congress. Their self-reported proficiency in setting up an event with a Member of Congress at their facilities also rose, as did their self-reported proficiency in posting comments on a legislator's Facebook page.

The surveys of the congressional staff who participated in the meetings showed that the Feeding America Advocacy Academy participants demonstrated the best practices for constituent meetings.<sup>18</sup> Whereas 12 percent of congressional staff report that the typical constituent they meet with is "very prepared," 97 percent of the staff reported that Advocacy Academy participants were "very prepared" for the meetings. Additionally, as Figure 8 shows, most of the participants: conveyed the impact of the issues they were discussing on the district or state; were specific in their requests for action; knew the Members' histories on the issue; and conveyed personal stories. As noted earlier in Figure 4, these data and behaviors are cited by congressional staff as most helpful and influential in the policy decision-making process – and, conversely, not frequently included in a typical constituent interactions.

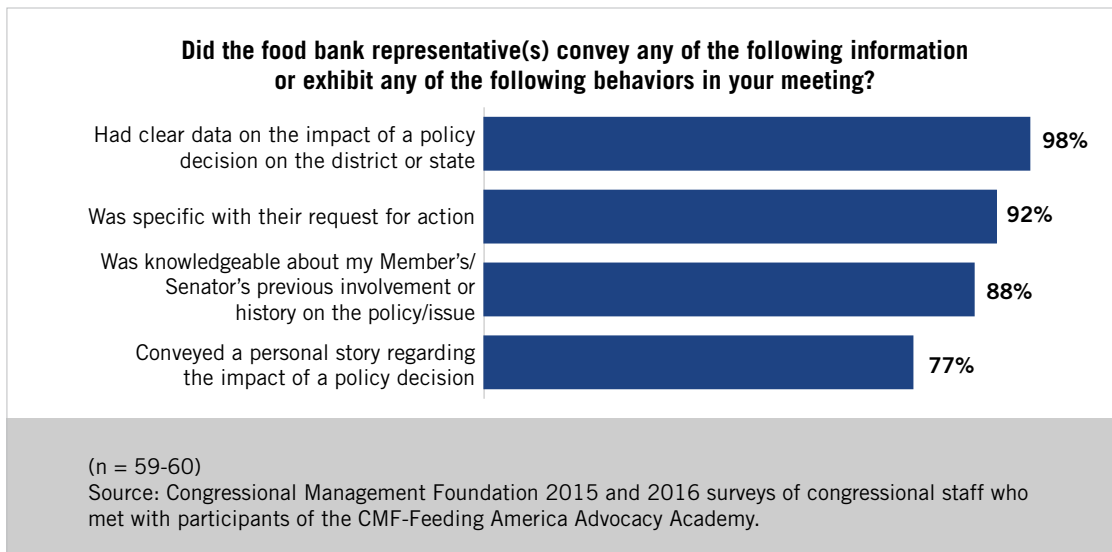
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<sup>18</sup> Survey responses from the participants and the congressional staff whom they met with was remarkably similar for the 2015 and 2016 academies. Because of this, the data for both years are combined for this report. More information on the surveys is provided on page 36.

**FIGURE 7.**



**FIGURE 8.**



Additionally, researchers wished to learn whether Advocacy Academy participants had built the foundation of a long-term relationship with the offices. In fact, 90 percent of congressional staff responded they considered the participant a “trustworthy source for accurate and reliable information on issues affecting their nonprofit organization,” and 95 percent considered them a trustworthy source on “issues affecting the people they serve in their community.”

These practical experiments reinforce the 12 years of research CMF has conducted with Congress on citizen engagement and points to some lessons advocacy organizations can glean from this work, outlined in the next section.

*“The research that I did on our legislators was very helpful and provided me with much insight and shaped my approach with each individual legislator.”*

*—Advocacy Academy Participant*

## **Citizen Impact Story: Feeding More Arizonans through a Tax Credit**

St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance is the oldest food bank in the U.S. and serves more than tens of thousands of families across Arizona each year. David Martinez III oversees their government relations efforts and supports programming for their clients. As many other professionals do, he finds coordinating a state-wide legislative agenda to be difficult, especially when it is not his only responsibility. However, when he saw the need for legislation that could help all Arizona food banks, he rose to the task.

As a charity, St. Mary's is dependent on financial donations. To increase incentives for donations, David decided to build a coalition to push for a greater tax credit for citizens. Using the lessons he learned in the CMF-Feeding America advocacy academy he became a strong spokesman for the tax credit, and to bolster the voice of his nonprofit network, he took it upon himself to train others in the techniques of effective advocacy. “I've travelled more than 2,000 miles throughout Arizona and hosted advocacy 101 workshops. We've enlisted 1,000 active advocates,” David said.

The result: the Arizona legislature passed legislation to double the tax credit for citizens. Families now can donate up to \$800 to foodbanks and receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit through their tax return. St. Mary's estimates that since the provision has been in effect, more than \$2 million will flow into Arizona food banks that wouldn't otherwise come in.

# Lessons for Advocacy Organizations

The results of this research raise questions as to the priorities, investments, and efficacy of many grassroots programs involving millions of citizens. As the constituent-congressional dialogue has become more complex – with a myriad of new ways for constituents to interact with their elected officials – advocacy groups and citizens will need to adapt their strategies. Below are some lessons groups can take from this research.

## 1. Organizations should embrace a citizen-centric advocacy model.

Most associations, nonprofits, and companies that invest in advocacy focus their energies in two places: government relations personnel (lobbyists) and email campaigns (through their websites) to Congress. This research suggests groups should refocus their energies on their citizen-supporters. By placing the citizen at the center of their strategy (as opposed to a once-a-year tactic during fly-ins) groups will build stronger bonds between their causes and Congress. With citizens integrated into the heart of advocacy efforts, Congress will be able to better understand and appreciate the impact of their decisions on constituents affected by those decisions.

This recommendation does not mean citizen-advocates can replace professional advocates. Lobbyists are essential to understanding the flow of the legislative process and the nuance of public policy. In addition, they are usually leading issue experts in their field who provide valuable information to Congress. Having said that, only citizens can translate the impact of those policies at a personal level – yet they are too often viewed as an ancillary part of a strategy rather than central to it. Associations, nonprofits, and companies who *empower* their supporters will not only see more public policy successes, they'll breed more optimism and satisfaction among stakeholders.

*“Visitors love “constituent coffees,” and advocates who wouldn’t otherwise be able to meet with the Member get the chance to explain the issues that are important to them and their group.”*

*—Senate Legislative Correspondent*

## 2. Organizations should embrace relationship building as a metric for success to augment other measurements.

Measuring the success of grassroots advocacy efforts is difficult and often has only two metrics. 1) How many messages did we send to Capitol Hill? 2) Did we pass or block a bill?

This research suggests that advocacy groups should expand those metrics and develop tangible ways to measure relationships built. Other metrics could include:

- How many constituents of key lawmakers are actively engaged with the lawmakers?
- How often are our members meeting and/or substantively communicating with their Senators and Representatives?
- How many advanced grassroots advocates do we have in key districts and states?
- How well are we collecting and communicating district and state-specific data about our issue through our members?
- Has a key lawmaker visited a facility significant to our cause or participated in one of our events?

To be fair, collecting relationship-building metrics is a significant challenge for advocacy groups, as supporters typically work full-time and engage in advocacy activities as time permits. CMF has observed some organizations in Washington, D.C., using these advanced metrics – but they are few in number. Having said that, relationship-building metrics are also a more accurate reflection of progress in grassroots advocacy; and therefore, advocacy groups should seek solutions to overcome organizational challenges that prevent the collection and usage of relationship-building metrics.

While email campaigns are still useful in advocacy efforts, *especially* when citizens take time to personalize the message, this research also suggests that a variety of strategies are now required to foster long-term relationships between lawmakers and citizens. Advocacy groups are the best conduit for encouraging relationship building.

*“Learning how to interact with the staffers was key for me. Learning that “they are people too” and that they want to be thanked was helpful. I’m no longer as nervous when scheduling meetings.”*

*—Advocacy Academy Participant*



### **3. Organizations should invest time to teach citizen-advocates.**

One of the great obstacles to citizens engaging with government is the belief that they don't know *how* to engage. To most people, Congress is an especially intimidating institution, and citizens rely on the organizations they're affiliated with to help them navigate it. As key players in the public policy process, grassroots organizations have a responsibility to help their supporters understand their important role in democracy.

Facilitators of grassroots advocacy need to increase and diversify their training programs and make citizen-advocacy an important part of their relationship with their supporters, members, or employees. One of the key achievements of the Feeding America Advocacy Academy was the tremendous boost in participants' confidence levels for interacting with lawmakers. The study-and-practice training model greatly diminished the fear factor that often accompanies talking to people perceived more powerful than them. CMF recognizes that this requires organizational buy-in and a shift in resources, but our research shows the immense value of that investment to organizations' advocacy efforts and to our democratic process.

# Conclusion

This report has focused on one-half of the equation in America's democratic dialogue: citizens and the organizations they affiliate with. In many ways, Congress has a greater responsibility to build meaningful relationships, communications, and understanding with the constituents it serves. While we have noted the significant changes to grassroots advocacy, these are only minor blips in most Americans' lives, as they do not regularly engage with their elected officials. For Members of Congress, these changes to citizen engagement have literally upended their world.

Congress must adapt its behaviors, attitudes, and practices in the same way advocacy groups must adapt. America needs modern advocacy and a modern Congress. This is why the Congressional Management Foundation will devote more resources to helping the Congress meet the changing expectations of the public. Our Congress 3.0 project, supported through a grant from Democracy Fund, seeks to demonstrate methods Members of Congress can employ to enhance their operations and engagement with citizens. Throughout 2017, CMF will release the results of experiments involving 16 congressional offices that have attempted to better themselves and enrich their relationships with constituents. These innovations could offer legislators new ways to build bridges and understanding between Congress and constituents.

As noted in the introduction, 30 years ago, political scientist Richard Fenno sought to document the valuable and robust relationship between citizens and their elected representatives. The desperate need for that relationship to flourish has never been greater. It is now up to citizens and Congress to adapt to the fluctuating challenges in our country, learn new ways to interact and understand one another, and rebuild what Fenno called the "irreducible underpinnings" of our democracy. With honesty, patience, and mutual respect, we can restore trust in our Congress – an essential component to effective, resilient, and responsive democratic institutions.

# References

## Research on General Congressional Interactions

**Survey of Congressional Staff on Communicating with Congress** (2015). Survey included 233 responses from House and Senate staff including Chiefs of Staff, Communications Directors, Legislative Directors, and Legislative Assistants. The survey was conducted August 2015 – October 2015. Partial results are included in this report for the first time.

**Survey of Congressional Policy Staff on Meetings between Citizens and Congress** (2014). Survey included 96 responses from House and Senate staff including Legislative Assistants and Legislative Directors. The survey was conducted August 2014 – October 2014. Partial results are included in this report for the first time.

**Survey on Social Media in Congress** (2014). Survey included 116 responses from House and Senate staff including Legislative Assistants, Legislative Directors, and Communications Directors. The survey was conducted July 2014 – August 2014. More information can be found in CMF report, *#SocialCongress 2015*.  
<http://congressfoundation.org/social-congress-2015>

**Survey of House District Directors in Congress** (2013). Survey included 53 responses from House District Directors. The survey was conducted August 2013 – November 2013. More information can be found in CMF report, *Face-to-Face with Congress: Before, During, and After Meetings with Legislators*.  
<http://congressfoundation.org/FacetoFace>

**Survey of House Chiefs of Staff** (2012). Survey included 50 responses from House Chiefs of Staff. The survey was conducted August 2012 – September 2012. More information can be found in CMF report, *Face-to-Face with Congress: Before, During, and After Meetings with Legislators*.  
<http://congressfoundation.org/FacetoFace>

**Survey of Congressional Staff on Communicating with Congress** (2010). Survey included 260 responses from House and Senate staff including Chiefs of Staff, Legislative Directors, and Communications Directors. The survey was conducted October 2010 – December 2010. More information can be found in CMF report, *Communicating with Congress: Perceptions of Citizen Advocacy on Capitol Hill*.  
<http://congressfoundation.org/cwc-perceptions>

**Surveys of Congressional Staff on Communicating with Congress** (2004). Surveys included 282 responses from House and Senate staff including Chiefs of Staff, Legislative Directors, and Communications Directors. The surveys were conducted August 2004 – December 2004. More information can be found in CMF report, *Communicating with Congress: How Capitol Hill is Coping with the Surge in Citizen Advocacy*.

<http://congressfoundation.org/cwc-surge>

## **Research on Advocacy Academy Participant Interactions**

**Surveys of Advocacy Academy Participants** (2015). Two surveys were conducted of the Advocacy Academy participants, one in February before their training began (23 responses) and one in July after their training was finished (21 responses). Partial results are included in this report for the first time.

**Surveys of Advocacy Academy Participants** (2016). Two surveys were conducted of the Advocacy Academy participants, one in February before their training began (25 responses) and one in July after their training was finished (22 responses). Partial results are included in this report for the first time.

**Survey of Congressional Staff on Meeting with Advocacy Academy Participants** (2015). Survey of 39 congressional staff who met with Advocacy Academy participants in July 2015. Partial results are included in this report for the first time.

**Survey of Congressional Staff on Meeting with Advocacy Academy Participants** (2016). Survey of 21 congressional staff who met with Advocacy Academy participants in July 2016. Partial results are included in this report for the first time.

# Acknowledgments

A report of this kind, comprised of 12 years of research, is clearly a compilation of many contributors, researchers, and writers. Nonetheless, there are a few people we wish to recognize.

CMF is consistently grateful to the congressional staff who provide us, and the nation, with guidance on how to best improve the democratic dialogue. They complete our surveys, attend focus groups, and respond to all our questions, and we thank them for their assistance.

CMF Research Assistants Brendan Carroll, Ryan Finn, and Charlie Hollis-Whittington helped us pull the various research data together. Current CMF staff who lent their editing skills and expertise in reviewing drafts include Susie Gorden, Kelsey Tokunaga, Seth Turner, and Jaime Werner. Our citizen engagement consultant, James Vaughn, was invaluable in guiding the recent research with CMF. We also wish to recognize former CMF staff, who during the past decade, have worked on this research related to communicating with Congress. Specifically, we thank CMF's former Executive Directors, Rick Shapiro (1989-2006) and Beverly Bell (2006-2010), who had the vision to launch this research in citizen engagement, thereby establishing a field of study for the current researchers to follow.

Also, we'd like to acknowledge Anita Estell's contribution to this field. Anita is a member of CMF's Board of Directors and author of *The Power of Us: The Art and Science of Enlightened Citizen Engagement and Collective Action*, in which she coined the phrase "citizen centrality." Anita is a passionate advocate for citizen engagement, part of the reason she founded The Civic Engagement and Leadership Institute for Everyone (CELIE).

Finally, CMF is deeply appreciative of our partnership with Feeding America. Their vision of a more robust relationship between Congress and anti-hunger advocates, leading to better public policy, was a driving theme of their portion of the project. Brett Weisel, Robb Friedlander, Lisa Davis, and Thao Nguyen have been central to the CMF-Feeding America relationship, and this research would not have been possible without their creative brilliance in the service of democracy.

# About the Congressional Management Foundation

*Established 1977*

## Who We Are

Citizen trust in an effective and responsive Congress is essential to democracy. Since 1977, the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) has advanced this goal by working directly with Members of Congress and staff to enhance their operations and interactions with constituents. CMF also works directly with citizen groups to educate them on how Congress works, giving constituents a stronger voice in policy outcomes. The aspirations are: a Congress more accountable, transparent, and effective; and an informed citizenry with greater trust in their democratic institutions.

## What We Accomplish

CMF enhances the effectiveness of congressional offices, enabling them to provide better services for their constituents and create better policy outcomes for all Americans.

CMF promotes transparency and accountability in Congress, affording citizens data and tools to become more informed about decisions that affect them, their families, and communities.

CMF educates and motivates individuals to become active and informed citizen-advocates, providing them with an understanding of Congress, the skills to influence public policy, and the value of citizen engagement.

CMF enhances the public's understanding of how the Congress really works, providing a window into our democratic institutions through its unique relationship with lawmakers and staff.

## How We Do It

CMF conducts professional development training and consultations for all levels of congressional staff to strengthen their office operations and management. CMF provides research, training, and publications to citizens and groups so they can better to enhance their interactions with Congress. CMF critiques and explains Congress – demystifying its operations. CMF conducts primary research on Congress and provides best practices guidance on office operations.

## Quick Facts

- More than 1,000 staff from more than 300 congressional offices participate in the training programs CMF conducts annually.
- Since 2015 CMF has conducted 195 educational sessions with more than 16,000 citizens on effectively communicating with Congress.
- Since 2000, CMF has conducted more than 500 strategic planning or other consulting projects with Members of Congress and their staffs.

For more information, contact CMF at 202-546-0100 or visit [www.CongressFoundation.org](http://www.CongressFoundation.org).

# THE PARTNERSHIP FOR *A More Perfect Union*

at the  
CONGRESSIONAL MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION

“We in America do *not* have government by the majority.  
We have government by the majority who participate.”  
—Thomas Jefferson

## *Become a Partner in Enriching the Relationship Between Citizens and Congress*

The *Partnership* is a subscription program within CMF that seeks to further our nation’s progress toward “a more perfect union” by fostering the genuine and effective exchange of ideas between Members of Congress and citizens.

We conduct communications best practices research and help forge relationships between congressional staff, advocates, and citizens through presentations, webinars and videos based on CMF research.

### Topics of Presentations

- “Screaming Monkeys, Roaring Lions: Making Noise vs. Making a Difference on Capitol Hill”
- “Use Social Media to Build Relationships with Lawmakers”
- “Build an Event in the State Members of Congress Will Attend”
- “Turn a 10-Minute Meeting with a Legislator into a Lifelong Relationship”
- “Tell a Story to Win the Hearts, Minds, and Votes of Lawmakers”
- “Build Relationships with Freshmen Lawmakers”

*“The Congressional Management Foundation is an incredible partner to National PTA and consistently provides relevant and valuable information to our team and members. By working with CMF, our advocacy campaigns are more effective and our members are better advocates at all levels of government.”*

—Jacki Ball, Director of Government Affairs, National PTA

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