



2015

CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

Safe States Alliance serves as the national voice in support of state and local injury and violence prevention professionals engaged in building a safer, healthier America. Safe States works to build relationships with Congressional and administration staff and serves as an advocate to represent Safe States Alliance's policy priorities and influence federal action that affects injury and violence prevention efforts.

As experts in the field of injury and violence prevention, Safe States Alliance members add a powerful voice to policymaking. Congressional recesses represent an important opportunity for you and other injury and violence prevention practitioners to meet with members to share information about the burden of injuries and violence within their districts and the prevention activities that are going on in your state.

When Congressional members spend time in the district, you may wish to:

- Invite a member to see a program in action or speak at an upcoming event;
- Attend a town hall meeting;
- Request an in-district meeting; and/or
- Work with the local media to raise the visibility of injury and violence topics and prevention programs in action.

This guide is intended help you understand the process and provide tools and ideas to help to communicate effectively with federal policymakers. As you do so, we also encourage you to learn about your agency or organization's policies and follow the rules as expressed by your state's ethics office.

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LOBBYING, ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The Safe States Alliance understands that many government employees have restrictions on the types of activities in which they may participate. ***Safe States encourages you to investigate your agency or organization's policies and grant requirements regarding lobbying, advocacy and educational efforts and follow these rules.***



Lobbying

Lobbying refers to efforts to influence a **specific** piece of legislation, such as asking Congress to increase a budget or to support/oppose a bill, amendment, regulation or policy.

Advocacy

Advocacy covers a much broader range of activities that can include educating legislators and conveying the value of using policy to protect the public's health, such as providing data and or stating supported arguments such as "using seat belts saves lives."

As always, Safe States Alliance encourages its members to engage in advocacy activities that are permissible according to applicable regulations. However, anyone, when representing themselves, can advocate regarding an issue or idea to legislators or their staff.

Education

Education refers to efforts to provide factual information such as a program description, goals, current budget, people served, and accomplishments. Education efforts do not address legislative actions or make value judgments.

FINDING YOUR CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES



Members spend time in their home district throughout the year including an extended period of time each summer. For more information about their schedules, visit the [House Calendar](#) and the [Senate Calendar](#).

Find your representatives in the [House](#) by entering your zip code.

Find your representatives in the [Senate](#) searching by state or by name.

KEY CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES

There are two distinct steps to creating and funding programs and agencies in the federal budget. Most programs must be established (authorized) through legislation AND funded through the appropriations process. Authorizing committees within Congress establish programs and may specify how much money should be spent on a program, but they do NOT actually set aside the money.

In appropriations bills, Congress and the president state the amount of money that will be spent on federal programs during the next fiscal year. There are 12 appropriations subcommittees in each house of Congress. They are divided among broad subject areas and each writes (or is supposed to write) an annual appropriations measure.

The following committees have jurisdiction for authorizing programs, such as the Traumatic Brain Injury or Violence Against Women Act or appropriating funds to public health and injury and violence prevention programs.

Authorizing	Appropriations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, HELP Subcommittee on Primary Health & Aging • House Energy & Commerce Committee, Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Health • House Ways & Means Committee, Ways & Means Subcommittee on Health • Senate Finance Committee, Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health Care and Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House Appropriations Committee, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies • Senate Appropriations Committee, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

TALKING POINTS

State and district-specific data and examples of programs in action are the most important information you can provide to Congressional members. Additional messages that may be helpful include:

National Data

- Injuries are the leading cause of death for ages 1-44 in the U.S.
- More than 500 people die each day and 180,000 die each year from injuries in the U.S.
- Every three minutes, a person dies from a preventable injury. Every 45 minutes, one of those preventable deaths is a child.
- Over 29 million individuals survive non-fatal injuries, only to cope with painful recoveries and rehabilitations. Nearly 9.2 million are children under age 19 that are seen in emergency rooms (ERs) for injuries.
- Every year, injuries and violence ultimately cost the U.S. \$406 billion: over \$80 billion in medical costs (6% of total health spending) and \$326 billion in lost productivity.



Role of Injury and Violence Prevention Programs

Strong injury and violence prevention programs are needed to:

- Select and implement evidence-based programs to prevent injuries and violence;
- Conduct surveillance, track trends, report, and analyze data to inform injury and violence prevention efforts in the state;
- Develop and maintain coalitions to support effective injury and violence prevention programs and policies;
- Educate the public, providers and other key audiences
- Provide information and data to inform state and local policy changes related to injuries and violence; and
- Evaluate evidence based interventions and strategies in program and policy.

SAFE STATES ALLIANCE'S POLICY AGENDA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Each year, the Safe States Alliance Policy Committee and Executive Committee work to identify and prioritize key federal policy issues. Position statements and additional background materials for Safe States' legislative priorities can be found [here](#) on the Safe States Alliance website.

INVITE MEMBERS TO SEE PROGRAMS IN ACTION AND SPEAK DURING EVENTS

This is an opportunity to showcase the importance of your work and the benefits it brings to community members. A site visit provides a Member with firsthand experience of seeing a program in action and this will leave a lasting impression. You may wish to ask a Member to speak at an upcoming statewide conference, coalition meeting or to view an injury and violence prevention program in action.

How to Request a Visit

Call your Member's district office - request to speak with the appointments secretary or scheduler. Identify yourself - who you are, who you work for, the purpose of your call (to request a site visit). Following your request, ask about office procedures for scheduling a member visit. Be prepared to discuss the specifics of what you are inviting the member to do, how many people will be in attendance and where the visit would take place. Reach out as soon as possible as Members' calendars fill up quickly. Consider offering several times that would work to see a program in action or attend a meeting. If needed, submit a written request and follow up by phone or email within a day or two to confirm.

Preparing for the Visit

- Work with Member's staff to coordinate details of the visit including the time and location, as well as lining up local media if at all possible.
- Determine what your goals are and the best use of your time with the Member or their staff. You will likely have approximately 10-15 minutes, so pick one to two issues to highlight. Describe how injuries and violence impact the state/district and highlight prevention strategies that have/are making a difference.
- If you go with a group, pick a primary spokesperson and make sure everyone is on the same page on key talking points.
- Have succinct written materials - one pagers, fact sheets, brochures - ready to hand out as well as business cards. One pagers on the Safe States Alliance legislative priorities can be found [here](#).
- Involve local media if possible.

After the Visit

- Send a thank you note to the Member and the staffers for the visit.
- Continue to keep in contact by sharing new reports and other information that may be helpful.
- Let Safe States Alliance know about your meeting and any planned next steps by calling 770-690-9000 or emailing governmentrelations@safestates.org.

Sample Letter of Invitation

The Honorable [Insert First and Last Name]
United States [Senate or House of Representatives]
[Insert office number] House or Senate Office Building
Washington DC, [20510 Senate or 20515 House]

Dear [Senator or Representative Name]:

I would like to invite you to visit the [Organization Name/program name] on [date] to learn about the burden of injuries and violence in [state or district] and prevention programs in place to address this critical public health issue.

During your visit, you will [insert information about what will be covered, who they may meet, what they would see, who else would be there]. If you have questions about specific injury and violence issues, please let us know and we will be happy to address them.

We look forward to your visit. If you have any questions about the trip, please do not hesitate to contact [insert contact information].

Sincerely
[Name, Title, Organization]

ATTEND A SCHEDULED TOWN HALL EVENT

During Congressional recess, Congress and Senate Members often hold in-district events referred to as town hall meetings that are open to the public. These meetings are important forums for Members to learn about constituent issues. Additionally, reporters often attend these events, providing an opportunity to bring attention to injury and violence issues raised during the meeting.



How to Find Out When Town Hall Events are Scheduled

Members often publicize town hall events and other local appearances in a number of ways - press releases, newsletters, newspaper, social media, and making details available on their website. Additionally you can always call their district office for information and upcoming events. Sign-up for the alert lists to receive Members' newsletters, press releases and other notices, and consider following the Member on Twitter if they have an account.

Preparing to Attend the Town Hall Event

- Learn more about the event and if there is a specific theme for the event.
- Arrive early and sign in. Indicate that you have a question if there is a space for that on the sign-in sheet.
- Come prepared - have a specific and concise question in mind and practice your question in advance.
- Do your homework on the Member of Congress. Make sure you know a little about the policymaker before you attend the meeting (such as their bio, voting record, positions and how they may be related to public health/injury and violence prevention priorities). If the Member has done something positive for the IVP community, begin by thanking the Member for that action.
- If called on, express your appreciation, identify yourself (share your professional role/organization if you have permission from your agency) and ask your question. For example:
"Good afternoon. Thank you for holding this important forum, I appreciate the opportunity to speak. My name is [First and Last Name]; I live in [Name of City/Town within the Member's district] and work at the [Organization Name] I am here today as a public health professional concerned about the injuries and violence in this community. Do you support [insert question]?"
- Encourage other injury and violence prevention professionals to attend, as well.
- If you are not able to ask your question during the event, you may be able to introduce yourself and ask your question before the Member leaves the event.

After the Town Hall Event

- Send a follow-up email to the Member, and share additional information about your programs/IVP issues in your state/district, if appropriate.
- Consider following up with staff periodically by e-mail to share local news of the work your organization is doing, particularly with federal support.
- Let Safe States Alliance know about your attendance and any planned next steps by calling 770-690-9000 or emailing governmentsrelations@safestates.org.

REQUEST AN IN-DISTRICT MEETING

How to Request a Meeting

- Call your Member's district office.
- Identify yourself - who you are, who you work for, the purpose of your call (to request a meeting with the Member or staffer) and others who would be in attendance.
- Send a follow up email to confirm meeting specifics.

Meeting Preparation Tips

- **DO** come prepared - know what issue(s) you are going to talk about prior to the meeting. You will likely only have 10-15 minutes, so be prepared and plan to talk succinctly about one or two key issues. Prepare talking points such as:
 - Burden of injury in the state/district - provide personal stories if at all possible.
 - Specific examples, key successes/programs in action - highlighting federal programs in your state (NVDRS, RPE, Core VIPP, etc).
 - Role/importance of prevention programs.
- **DO** your homework on the Member of Congress. Make sure you know a little about the policymaker before you attend the meeting (such as their bio, voting record, positions and how they may relate to public health priorities).
- **DO** bring some written materials - one pagers, fact sheets, brochures - to leave behind.
- **DO** arrive to the meeting 5 minutes early.
- **DO** realize the importance of meeting with staff members - these are people who present the information to the Congress member and are a very valuable resource.
- **DO** identify yourself and make a connection with the district at the start of the meeting.
- **DO** pick a primary spokesperson if you go with a group and make sure everyone is on the same page on key talking points. A group or a coalition of like-minded partners can demonstrate the support for an issue within the district.
- **DO** be respectful and do not argue with the Member / staffer.
- **DON'T** be afraid to say "I don't know, I'll have to get back to you" if you are unsure of the answer to a question.

After the Meeting

- Send a thank you note to the Member and the staffers for the meeting.
- Continue to keep in contact especially when there are opportunities to work together.
- Let Safe States Alliance know about your visit and any planned next steps by calling 770-690-9000 or emailing governmentrelations@safestates.org.

WORK WITH LOCAL MEDIA

To keep up with community activities and interests, Members of Congress follow the local media. Writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on injury and violence prevention demonstrates that this is an issue of concern to constituents, in addition to creating more awareness among the general public. Once your submission is published, you can send an email to your Congressional members to directly share this information. You can also share this information with the Safe States Alliance National Office by emailing governmentrelations@safestates.org.

Letters to the Editor

- Use a letter to the editor to respond to or rebut an article previously published in the newspaper or magazine.
- Offer your personal/professional experience that is relevant to the topic.
- Letters to the editor should be no more than 200 words.
- Sample Letters to the Editor
 1. [Child Maltreatment](#) Letter to the Editor
 2. [Falls](#) Letter to the Editor
 3. [Fires](#) Letter to the Editor
 4. [IVP Program](#) Letter to the Editor

Op-eds

An op-ed is slightly longer than a Letter to the Editor and is essentially a persuasive article that can be used to raise the visibility of injury and violence prevention issues. You don't have to wait for a news article to begin writing an op-ed. Think about predictable injury- and violence-related events (motor vehicle crashes, prescription drug overdoses, back to school, etc) and write a majority of the op-ed when you have time to think and develop your piece. Monitor the news to determine when to submit. Google Alert and other Web services can track news and provide hooks and timing for op-ed pieces. The final piece can be adjusted based on the news piece you are reacting to and quickly submitted for consideration.

- Most op-eds relate to an issue in recent news, but also provide a different perspective, idea or action. While still an opinion piece, op-eds are balanced with factual information.
- Check the paper's website first to guidelines for accepting op-ed submissions.
- Op-eds should be 750 words or less, depending on the guidelines of the newspaper.

- Writing tips:
 - Choose a central point and then use facts and personal experience to create a credible and compelling story.
 - Avoid jargon and use simple language.
- Sample Op-eds:
 - [Older Adult Falls](#) Op-ed
 - [Traumatic Brain Injury](#) Op-ed
 - [Prescription Drug Overdose](#) Op-ed
 - [Gun Violence Prevention](#) Op-ed

Newspaper Articles

- If your organization has a public information officer, meet with them first to learn more about your organization's media outreach guidelines, as well as to learn more about the local media environment and the reporters who cover your issues. They would also likely have resources to help you prepare for placing an article regarding injury and violence prevention issues in local communities and across the state.
- Develop a relationship with local reporters who cover health and safety issues. Share information about your organization and the programs and services you offer. Provide your contact information and offer to be a resource for data and other information needed. Send reports, success stories, and other information to your contacts on a regular basis.