

Wisconsin United To Amend

Citizen Lobbying Guide

(adapted from Indivisible Guide)

Today, our elected representatives primarily represent the moneyed interests that fund their election campaigns. Elected officials that don't follow the party dictates are often "primaried" -- ousted by an even better financed opponent in their own party.

This step-by-step guide is for individuals, groups, and organizations that want to be heard in an environment where the needs of everyday citizens are routinely ignored.

Here's the quick and dirty summary of this document. While this page summarizes top-level takeaways, the full document describes how to actually carry out these activities.

CHAPTER 1 How your representative thinks — reelection, reelection, reelection — and how to use that to save democracy. Representatives want their constituents to think well of them and they want good, local press. They hate surprises, wasted time, and most of all, bad press that makes them look weak, unlikable, and vulnerable. You will use these interests to make them listen and act.

CHAPTER 2 Identify or organize your local group. Is there an existing local group or network you can join? Or do you need to start your own? We suggest steps to help mobilize your fellow constituents locally and start organizing for action.

CHAPTER 3 Four local advocacy tactics that actually work. Most of you have three state and three U.S. representatives. Whether you like it or not, they are your voices at the state capitol and in Washington. Your job is to make sure they are, in fact, speaking for you. We've identified four key opportunity areas that just a handful of local constituents can use to great effect. Always record encounters on video, prepare questions ahead of time, coordinate with your group, and report back to local media:

1. **Town halls.** Representatives regularly hold public in-district events to show that they are listening to constituents. Make them listen to you, and report out when they don't.
2. **Non-town hall events.** Representatives love cutting ribbons and kissing babies back home. Don't let them get photo-ops without questions about money in politics.
3. **District office meetings.** Every representative has one or more district offices. Make an appointment. Ask for a meeting with the representative. Report to the world if they refuse to listen.
4. **Coordinated calls.** Calls are a light lift but can have an impact. Organize your local group to barrage your representatives at an opportune moment about and on a specific issue.

CHAPTER 1

This chapter explains how congressional offices and the people within them work, and what that means for your advocacy strategy.

IT'S ALL ABOUT REELECTION, REELECTION, REELECTION

To influence your own representative, you have to understand one thing: every House or Assembly member runs for office every two years, state senators every four years and every U.S. Senator runs for election every six years. Functionally speaking, representatives are always either running for office or getting ready for their next election — a fact that shapes everything they do.

To be clear, this does not mean that your representative is cynical and unprincipled. The vast majority of people in Congress believe in their ideals, and care deeply about representing their constituents and having a positive impact. But they also know that if they want to make change, they need to stay in office.

This constant reelection pressure means that representatives are enormously sensitive to their image in the district or state, and will work very hard to avoid signs of public dissent or disapproval. What every representative wants — regardless of party — is for his or her constituents to agree with the following narrative:

“My representative cares about me, shares my values, and is working hard for me.”

If your actions threaten this narrative, then you will unnerve your representative and change their decision-making process.

If your senators and representative are doing what they should to fight against big money in politics and for political equality, then congratulations! They’re making the right public statements, co-sponsoring the right bills, and voting the right way. So how does this change your strategy? Two key things to keep in mind:

1. Do NOT switch to targeting other representatives who don’t represent you. They don’t represent you, and they don’t care what you have to say. Stick with your own local representatives.
2. DO use this guide to engage with your representatives locally. Instead of pressuring them to do the right thing, praise them for doing the right thing. This is important because it will help ensure that they continue to do the right thing. Congressional staff are rarely contacted when the representatives does something good — your efforts locally will provide highly valuable positive reinforcement.

HELP, MY REPRESENTATIVE IS IN A SAFE DISTRICT!

If your representative is in a heavily Democratic or Republican district, you may assume that they have a safe seat and there’s nothing you can do to influence them. This is not true! The reality is that no representative ever considers themselves to be safe from all threats. Representatives who have nothing to fear from a general election still worry about primary challenges.

More broadly, no one stays a representative without being borderline compulsive about protecting their image. Even the safest representative will be deeply alarmed by signs of organized opposition, because these actions create the impression that they’re not connected to their district and not listening to their constituents.

WHAT DOES A REPRESENTATIVE’S OFFICE DO, AND WHY?

Representative offices perform the following functions:

- **Constituent services.** Staff connect with both individual constituents and local organizations, serving as a link to and an advocate within the federal government on issues such as visas, grant applications, and public benefits.

- **Communicate with constituents directly.** Staff take calls, track constituent messages, and write letters to stay in touch with constituents’ priorities, follow up on specific policy issues that constituents have expressed concern about, and reinforce the message that they are listening.
- **Meet with constituents.** Representatives and staff meet with constituents to learn about local priorities and build connections.
- **Seek and create positive press.** Staff try to shape press coverage and public information to create a favorable image for the representative.
- **Host and attend events in district.** Representatives host and attend events in the district to connect with constituents, understand their priorities, and get good local press.
- **Actual legislating.** Representatives and staff decide their policy positions, develop and sponsor bills, and take votes based on a combination of their own beliefs, pressure from leadership/lobbyists, and pressure from their constituents.

WHAT YOUR REPRESENTATIVE CARES ABOUT

When it comes to constituent interactions, representatives care about things that make them look good, responsive, and hardworking to the people of their district. In practice, that means that they care about some things very much, and other things very little:

REPRESENTATIVE CARES A LOT ABOUT	REPRESENTATIVE DOESN'T CARE MUCH ABOUT
Verified constituents from the district (or state for U.S. Senators)	People from outside the district (or state for U.S. Senators)
Advocacy that requires effort — the more effort, the more they care. Calls, personal emails, and especially showing up in person in the district.	Form letters, a Tweet, or Facebook comment (unless they generate widespread attention)
Local press and editorials, maybe national press.	Wonky D.C.- based news (depends on the representative)
An interest group’s endorsement.	Your thoughtful analysis of the proposed bill
Groups of constituents, locally famous individuals, or big individual campaign contributors.	A single constituent
Concrete asks that entail a verifiable action — vote for a bill, make a public statement, etc.	General ideas about the world
A single ask in your communication — letter, email, phone call, office visit, etc.	A laundry list of all the issues you’re concerned about

WHAT YOUR REPRESENTATIVE IS THINKING: GOOD OUTCOME VS. BAD OUTCOME

To make this a bit more concrete and show where advocacy comes in, below are some examples of actions that a representative might take, what they're hoping to see happen as a result, and what they really don't want to see happen. Some representatives will go to great lengths to avoid bad outcomes — even as far as changing their positions or public statements.

EXAMPLE ACTION	DESIRED OUTCOME	BAD OUTCOME
Letter to Constituent	Constituent feels happy that their concerns were answered.	Constituent posts letter on social media saying it didn't answer their questions or didn't answer for weeks/months, calls Congressman Bob unresponsive and untrustworthy.
In-district Event	Local newspaper reports that Congresswoman Sara appeared at opening of new bridge, which she helped secure funding for.	Local newspaper reports that protestors barraged Congresswoman Sara with questions about corruption in the infrastructure bill.
Town Hall / Listening Session	Local newspaper reports that Congressman Bob hosted a town hall and discussed his work to balance the budget.	Local newspaper reports that angry constituents strongly objected to Congressman Bob's support for privatizing Medicare.
Policy Position	Congresswoman Sara votes on a bill and releases a press statement hailing it as a step forward.	Congresswoman Sara's phones are deluged with calls objecting to the bill. A group of constituents stage an event outside her district office and invite press to hear them talk about how the bill will personally hurt their families.

CHAPTER 2

SHOULD I FORM A GROUP?

There's no need to reinvent the wheel — if an activist group or network is already attempting to do congressional advocacy along these lines, just join up with them. Depending on your representative's

district, it may make sense to have more than one group. This congressional map tool (www.govtrack.us/congress/members/map) shows the boundaries for your district.

If you look around and can't find a group working specifically on local action focused on your representatives in your area, just start doing it! It's not rocket science. You really just need two things:

1. Ten or so people (but even fewer is a fine start!) who are geographically nearby — ideally in the same congressional district.
2. A commitment from those people to devote a couple hours per month to fighting against money in politics and for political equality.

HOW TO FORM A GROUP

If you do want to form a group, here are our recommendations on how to go about it:

1. **Decide you're going to start a local group** dedicated to overturning Citizens United, getting the big money out of politics and putting people's rights ahead of corporate privileges. This might be a subgroup of an already existing activist group, or it might be a new effort — it really depends on your circumstances. Start where people are: if you're in a group with a lot of people who want to do this kind of thing, then start there; if you're not, you'll need to find them somewhere else. The most important thing is that this is a **local**, preferably **nonpartisan** group. Your band of heroes is focused on applying local pressure, which means you all need to be local.
2. **Contact [Wisconsin United To Amend](#) for a list of supporters in your area.** We can also provide brochures, handouts, posters, buttons, bumper stickers and T-shirts to help you get started.
3. **Identify a few additional co-founders** who are interested in participating and recruiting others. Ideally, these are people who have different social networks from you so that you can maximize your reach.
4. **Email your contacts and post a message on your Facebook**, on any local Facebook groups that you're a member of, and/or other social media channels you use regularly. Say that you're starting a group for constituents of Congresswoman Sara, dedicated to overturning Citizens United and ask people to email you to sign up.
5. **Invite everyone who has expressed interest to an in-person kickoff meeting.** Use this meeting to agree on a name, principles for your group, roles for leadership, a way of communicating, and a strategy for your representative. Rule of thumb: 50% of the people who have said they are definitely coming will show up to your meeting. Aim high! Get people to commit to come — they'll want to because saving democracy is fun.
 - a. **Manage the meeting:** Keep people focused on the ultimate core strategy: applying pressure to your representative to overturn Citizens United. it's important to make sure that the conversation stays focused on developing a group and a plan of action dedicated to this strategy.
 - b. **Decide on a name:** Good names include the geographic area of your group, so that it's clear that you're rooted in the community — e.g., "Oshkosh United To Amend" You are 100% welcome to pick up and run with the United To Amend name if you want, but we won't be hurt if you don't.

- c. **Agree on a mission:** This is your chance to say what your group stands for. As a starting point, consider the mission found on the [Wisconsin United To Amend](#) website.
- d. **Volunteer for roles:** Figure out how to divide roles and responsibilities among your group. This can look very different depending on who's in the room, but at a minimum, you probably want 1-2 people in charge of overall group coordination, a designated media/social media contact, and 1-2 people in charge of tracking the congressional office's schedule and events. In addition to these administrative roles, ask attendees how they want to contribute to advocacy efforts: attend events, record events, ask questions, make calls, host meetings, engage on social media, write op-eds for local papers, etc.
- e. **Adopt means of communication:** You need a way of reaching everyone in your group in order to coordinate actions. This can be a Facebook group, a Google group, a Slack team — whatever people are most comfortable with. It may be wise to consider secure or encrypted platforms such as Signal and WhatsApp.
- f. **Expand!** Enlist your members to recruit across their networks. Ask every member to send out the same outreach emails/posts that you did. Recruit people for your email list.

HOW DO I RECRUIT PEOPLE TO TAKE ACTION?

Most people are moved to take action through individual conversations. Here are some tips for having successful conversations to inspire people to take action with your group.

1. **Get the story.** What issues does the other person care about?
2. **Imagine what's possible.** How can your group change your community's relationship with your representative? How could your group, and others like it, protect our values?
3. **Commitment and ownership.** Ask a clear yes or no question: will you work with me to hold our representatives accountable? Then, get to specifics. Who else can they talk to about joining the group? What work needs to be done — planning a meeting, researching a representative — that they can take on? When will you follow up?

Ask open-ended questions! People are more likely to take action when they articulate what they care about and can connect it to the action they are going to take. A good rule of thumb is to talk 30% of the time or less and listen at least 70% of the time.

CHAPTER 3

FOUR LOCAL ADVOCACY TACTICS THAT ACTUALLY WORK

Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world. - Dolores Huerta

This chapter describes the nuts and bolts of implementing four advocacy tactics to put pressure on your state and federal representatives. Before we get there though, there's a few things all local groups should do:

Begin with these five steps to gather intel. Before anything else, take the following five steps to arm yourself with information necessary for all future advocacy activities.

1. Find your representatives, their official websites, and their office contact info at myvote.wi.gov (state) and callmycongress.com (federal). We've compiled much of the contact information in this [State Representatives](#) document.
2. Sign up on your representatives' website to receive regular email updates, invites to local events, and propaganda to understand what they're saying. Every representative has an e-newsletter. Monitor their [Facebook](#) page.
3. Find out where your representatives stands on the issues of the day — search for them on [Ballotpedia](#) and [VoteSmart.org](#). For federal candidates, research their biggest campaign contributors at [OpenSecrets.org](#). At the state level, there's Wisconsin Democracy Campaign's [Follow the Money](#).
4. Set up a Google News Alert (www.google.com/alerts) — for example for “Rep. Bob Smith” — to receive an email whenever your representative is in the news.
5. Research on Google News (news.google.com/news) what local reporters have written about your representatives. Find and follow them on [Twitter](#), and build relationships. Before you attend or plan an event, reach out and explain what your group is advocating for and provide them background materials and a quote. Journalists on deadline — even those who might not agree with you — appreciate when you provide easy material for a story.

OPPORTUNITY 1 TOWN HALLS/LISTENING SESSIONS

Representatives regularly hold local “Town Halls” or public listening sessions throughout their districts or state. These events can be used to great effect — both to directly pressure your representatives and to attract media to your cause.

PREPARATION

1. **Find out when your representative's next public town hall event is.** Sometimes these are announced well in advance, and sometimes they are “public” but only sent to select constituents through mailings shortly before the event. If you can't find announcements online, call your representative directly to find out. When you call, be friendly and say to the staffer, “Hi, I'm a constituent, and I'd like to know when his/her next town hall forum will be.” If they don't know, ask to be added to the email list so that you get notified when they do.
2. **Send out notice of the town hall to your group and get commitments from members to attend.** Distribute to all of them whatever information you have on your representative's voting record, as well as the prepared questions.
3. **Prepare several questions ahead of time for your group to ask.** Your questions should be sharp and fact-based, ideally including information on the representative's record, votes they've taken, or statements they've made. Thematically, they should focus on a limited number of issues to maximize impact. Prepare 5-10 of these questions and hand them out to your group ahead of the meeting. Example question:

The Supreme Court has twisted the words “speech” and “person” in our Constitution so that big money interests can fund and control our elected officials. Over **140 communities** here in Wisconsin have voted for resolutions calling for an end to an election system that is nothing more than legalized bribery. Nationwide over **800 communities** and **20 states** have called for a Constitutional amendment which would end this corruption.

Would you support a statewide vote on this amendment???

[optional] The amendment would make clear that:

- The rights protected in the Constitution are those of individual human beings only
- The spending of money is not speech, and political spending can be limited to allow all Americans to participate in the democratic process

SHOULD I BRING A SIGN?

Signs can be useful for reinforcing the sense of broad agreement with your message. However, if you're holding an oppositional sign, staffers will almost certainly not give you or the people with you the chance to get the mic or ask a question. If you have enough people to both ask questions and hold signs, though, then go for it!

AT THE TOWN HALL

1. **Get there early, meet up, and get organized.** Meet outside or in the parking lot for a quick huddle before the event. Distribute the handout of questions, and encourage members to ask the questions on the sheet or something similar.
2. **Get seated and spread out.** Head into the venue a bit early to grab seats at the front half of the room, but do not all sit together. Sit by yourself or in groups of two, and spread out throughout the room. This will help reinforce the impression of broad consensus.
3. **Make your voices heard by asking good questions.** When the representative opens the floor for questions, everyone in the group should put your hands up and keep them there. Look friendly or neutral so that staffers will call on you. When you're asking a question, remember the following guidelines:
 - a) **Stick with the prepared list of questions.** Don't be afraid to read it straight from the printout if you need to.
 - b) **Be polite but persistent, and demand real answers.** Representatives are very good at deflecting or dodging questions they don't want to answer. If the representative dodges, ask a follow-up question. If they aren't giving you real answers, then call them out for it. Other group members around the room should amplify by either booing the representative or applauding you.
 - c) **Don't give up the mic until you're satisfied with the answer.** If you've asked a hostile question, a staffer will often try to limit your ability to follow up by taking the microphone back immediately after you finish speaking. They can't do that if you keep a firm hold on the mic. No staffer in their right mind wants to look like they're physically intimidating a constituent, so they will back off. If they object, then say politely but loudly: "I'm not finished. The representative is dodging my question. Please allow me to follow up!"
 - d) **Keep the pressure on.** After one member of the group finishes, everyone should raise their hands again. The next member of the group to be called on should move down the list of questions and ask the next one.
4. **Support the group and reinforce the message.** After one member of your group asks a question, everyone should applaud to show that the feeling is shared throughout the audience. Whenever

someone from your group gets the mic, they should note that they're building on the previous questions — amplifying the fact that you're part of a broad group.

5. **Record everything!** Assign someone in the group to use their smart phone or video camera to record other advocates asking questions and the representative's response. While written transcripts are nice, **unfavorable exchanges caught on video can be devastating for representatives**. These clips can be shared through social media and picked up by local and national media.

AFTER THE TOWN HALL

1. **Reach out to media, during and after the town hall.** If there's media at the town hall, the people who asked questions should approach them afterwards and offer to speak about their concerns. When the event is over, you should engage local reporters on Twitter or by email and offer to provide an in-person account of what happened, as well as the video footage you collected. Example Twitter outreach:

“@reporter I was at Rep. Smith's town hall in Oshkosh today. Large group asked about money in politics. I have video & happy to chat.” - Note: It's important to make this a public tweet by including the period before the journalist's Twitter handle. Making this public will make the journalist more likely to respond to ensure they get the intel first.

2. **Share everything.** Post pictures, video, your own thoughts about the event, etc., to social media afterwards. Tag the representative's office and encourage others to share widely.
3. **Report back.** Please call (608-316-1792) or email (wisconsin@unitedtoamend.org) [Wisconsin United To Amend](#) so our progress and results can be tracked.

OPPORTUNITY 2 OTHER LOCAL PUBLIC EVENTS

In addition to town halls, representatives regularly attend public events for other purposes — parades, infrastructure groundbreaking, etc. Like town halls, these are opportunities to get face time with the representatives and make sure they're hearing about your concerns, while simultaneously changing the news story that gets written.

Similar to Town Halls, but with some tweaks. To take advantage of this opportunity, you can follow most of the guidelines above for town halls (filming, etc.). However, because these events are not designed for constituent input, you will need to think creatively about how to make sure your presence and message comes through loud and clear.

Tactics for these events may be similar to more traditional protests, where you're trying to shift attention from the scheduled event to your own message.

1. **Optimize visibility.** Unlike in town halls, you want your presence as a group to be recognizable and attention-getting at this event. It may make sense to stick together as a group, wear relatively similar clothing / message shirts, and carry signs in order to be sure that your presence is noticeable.
2. **Be prepared to interrupt and insist on your right to be heard.** Since you won't get the mic at an event like this, you have to attract attention to yourself and your message. Agree beforehand with your group on a simple message focused on a current or upcoming issue. Coordinate with each other to chant this message during any public remarks that your representative makes. This can be difficult

and a bit uncomfortable. But it sends a powerful message to your representative that they won't be able to get press for other events until they address your concerns.

3. **Identify, and try to speak with, reporters on the scene.** Be polite, friendly, and stick to your message. For example, "We're here to remind Assemblywoman Sara that her constituents want a statewide vote regarding money in politics." You may want to research in advance which local reporters cover representatives or relevant beats, so that you know who to be looking for.
4. **Report back.** Please call (608-316-1792) or email (wisconsin@unitedtoamend.org) [Wisconsin United To Amend](#) so our progress and results can be tracked.

OPPORTUNITY 3 IN-OFFICE VISITS

Every representative has at least one district office, and many representatives have several spread through their district or state. These are public offices, open for anybody to visit — an appointment is preferable, but drop-ins can be effective too. You can take advantage of this to stage a sort of impromptu town hall meeting by showing up with a small group. It is much harder for district or DC staff to turn away a group than a single constituent, even without an appointment.

1. **Find out where your representatives local offices are.** The official webpage for your representative will list the address of every local office. You can find those web pages easily through a simple Google search.
2. **Plan a trip when the representative is there.** Most representative district offices are open only during regular business hours, 9am-5pm. While federal representatives spend a fair amount of time in Washington, they are often "in district" on Mondays and Fridays, and there are weeks designated for representatives to work in district. The representative is most likely to be at the "main" office — the office in the largest city in the district, and where the representative's District Director works. Ideally, plan a time when you and several other people can show up together.
3. **Prepare several questions ahead of time.** As with the town halls, you should prepare a list of questions ahead of time.
4. **Call ahead for an appointment.** Politely, but firmly, ask to meet with the representative directly.
5. **Meet with the representative and their staffer.** Even if you are able to get a one-off meeting with the representative, you are most often going to be meeting with their staff. In district, the best person to meet with is the District Director, or the head of the local district office you're visiting. There are real advantages to building a relationship with these staff. In some cases, they may be more open to populist ideas than the representative him/herself, and having a good meeting with/building a relationship with a supportive staff member can be a good way to move your issue up the chain of command. Follow these steps for a good staff meeting:
 - a. Have a specific "ask" — E.g. vote against X, cosponsor Y, publicly state Z, etc.
 - b. Leave staff with a **brief** write up of your issue, with your ask clearly stated.
 - c. Talking points:

- i. It's the right thing to do. America is supposed to be a representative democracy. What we have now is crony capitalism, with billionaires and corporate fat cats in control. 99.9% of Americans have no say in our policies and no representation.
 - ii. Over 110 communities have already called for this. 2.8 million people (49% of Wisconsinites) live in jurisdictions that have called for an amendment. The average Yes vote is over 80% for this.
 - iii. Politicians in Washington spend 40-70% of their time raising money, instead of doing their job.
 - iv. Our legislators are afraid to do what's right, for fear of being "primaried" with anonymous donors running negative ads. All these negative ads cause more and more polarization.
- d. Be polite — Yelling at the underpaid, overworked staffer won't help your cause.
 - e. Be persistent — Get their business card and call/email them regularly; ask if the representative has taken action on the issue.
6. **Report back.** Please call (608-316-1792) or email (wisconsin@unitedtoamend.org) [Wisconsin United To Amend](http://WisconsinUnitedToAmend.org) so our progress and results can be tracked. Thanks!

OPPORTUNITY 4 MASS CALLS

Mass office calling is a light lift, but it can actually have an impact.

1. **Find the phone numbers for your representatives.** Again, you can find your local representatives and their office phone numbers at myvote.wi.gov (state) and callmycongress.com (federal).
2. **Prepare a single question per call.** For in-person events, you want to prepare a host of questions, but for calls, you want to keep it simple. You and your group should all agree to call in on one specific issue that day. The question should be about a live issue — e.g. a vote that is coming up, a chance to take a stand, or some other time-sensitive opportunity. The next day or week, pick another issue, and call again on that.
3. **If you're directed to voicemail, follow up with email. Then follow up again.** Getting more senior legislative staff on the phone is tough. The junior staffer will probably just tell you "I checked, and she's not at her desk right now, but would you like to leave a voicemail?" Go ahead and leave a voicemail, but don't expect a call back. Instead, after you leave that voicemail, follow up with an email to the staffer. If they still don't respond, follow up again. If they still don't respond, let the world know that the representative's office is dodging you.
4. **Keep a record of the conversation.** Take detailed notes on everything the staffer tells you. Direct quotes are great, and anything they tell you is public information that can be shared widely. Compare notes with the rest of your group, and identify any conflicts in what they're telling constituents. Also, report back to [Wisconsin United To Amend](http://WisconsinUnitedToAmend.org) and your media contacts.