

# Identify an Ask

## WHY BUILD A RELATIONSHIP?

Meeting with your policymakers and their staffs is a valuable opportunity for you to educate them about the outstanding work you're doing in their state or district and to establish yourself as a knowledgeable resource. This permits them to come to you with a specific question about a health-related topic within your expertise, or for you to go to them with a problem or challenge they can help you solve. Members of Congress and other policymakers are influential people in your community and can be effective problem solvers for their constituents.

Your **Connect** meetings are an important first step—or, for some of you, a next step—in a relationship-building process. During your meeting, you may have a rushed five minutes with a policymaker or a 45-minute-long thoughtful discussion. In either scenario, you need a plan for further engaging them and establishing an increased level of trust and credibility. The best place to start is with a good ask.

## WHAT IS AN “ASK”?

An ask is policy-speak for a specific request that you make of your policymaker during your meeting. Whether you're talking with a member in person or with a member of their staff, they will be waiting for you to make the ask. They expect it, and in some cases they will even prompt you (e.g., “So, what can we help you with today?”). Remember, policymakers and their staff are looking for ways to help constituents and will welcome an opportunity to do something specific to help further your important work.

Often, an ask focuses on creating an additional opportunity for educating your policymaker or their staff about your work. For example, you can ask them to visit and see your work firsthand. Other good asks might include: hosting an upcoming event with you; drafting a letter of support for a grant proposal; or helping you get a meeting with someone in the community whom you might not otherwise reach.

When you make your ask during your meeting, be sure to give the policymaker or staff person time to respond. Also, give them an opportunity to offer suggestions.

The bottom line—always be prepared with a good ask.



## A GOOD ASK IS:

**Actionable.** It is a specific task that is within the power of your policymaker to accomplish.

**Linked to their interests.** Connect your ask to an issue that is important to your policymaker.

**Advances your work.** Although the ask is ultimately about building a relationship, this is also an opportunity to accomplish something positive.

**REMEMBER**—A good ask is *not* linked to specific legislation, which includes asking for appropriated or earmarked funding for your project. Those types of asks would constitute *lobbying* and are therefore off-limits for a Foundation-supported visit.

There are many asks you can make that will help you to advance your work and deepen your relationship with a policymaker. One surefire ask for relationship-building is to invite them to make a site visit to see your work firsthand, and better understand how what you're doing impacts their constituents. More information is included below on preparing for a great site visit. You can see a sampling of the asks **Connect** participants have made in the past on page 20, which also includes additional description of best practices. All example asks in this manual are meant to help you brainstorm, but don't feel you have to choose from the list. You should pursue the ask that you and your coach decide will be most beneficial to your work.

# What Can I Ask of My Policymaker?

Here are some suggestions and examples of asks other **Connect** participants have made of their members of Congress or other policymakers. Remember, sometimes your request may relate directly to an immediate opportunity or problem you face. Other times, it may focus entirely on creating a new opportunity to connect a policymaker to your work and continue the relationship-building process. Here are just some examples of asks effectively made by past **Connect** participants, with notes on how each can advance your work:



<b>If You Want To ...</b>	<b>Consider Asking Them To ...</b>
<b>Help the policymaker understand your work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit and meet constituents affected by the problem or benefitting from your solution</li> <li>• Include a member of your team on their health issues advisory board</li> </ul>
<b>Validate your work for prospective partners or funders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write a letter on behalf of your organization, recognizing the importance of your work</li> <li>• Enter a statement in an official legislative record, like the Congressional Record</li> </ul>
<b>Make connections to potential partners, like a mayor, a business leader or a nonprofit executive director</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write a letter of introduction to a specific community leader</li> <li>• Arrange a meeting with a specific community leader</li> <li>• Convene a forum with a group of community leaders</li> </ul>
<b>Educate other government policymakers about your work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write an informative letter to his or her colleagues</li> <li>• Arrange a meeting with or help you communicate with an agency official</li> <li>• Hold a roundtable for other policymakers and their staffs</li> </ul>
<b>Cut through the red tape</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call or write a government agency on your behalf</li> </ul>
<b>Get funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research available government agency grant funding that may be appropriate for your work</li> <li>• Write a letter to a government agency or a private philanthropy in support of your grant proposal</li> </ul>
<b>Get public attention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include an article about your work in their constituent newsletter, or write an article in yours</li> <li>• Write an op-ed about your issue or your work</li> <li>• Speak at a conference or other public event</li> </ul>

*For details on how to make your ask a reality, refer to the "Follow-through Is Everything" section on page 41.*

A “site visit” is a surefire way to engage your policymaker in your work. It allows them to see firsthand the work that you are doing and connects them in an effective way by creating a visual image.

#### ASKING A POLICYMAKER TO SCHEDULE A SITE VISIT

##### WHAT'S A SITE VISIT?

A “site visit” gives a policymaker and/or their staff the opportunity to see your work firsthand by traveling to a facility or other location where your work—and the benefits it provides—is in full action. This can be your organization’s headquarters, a neighborhood clinic, a school or another location. Many site visits include a tour and give the policymaker a chance to meet the people who are making a difference and speak with the people who are benefiting from your programs.

##### WHAT'S THE VALUE OF ASKING A POLICYMAKER FOR A SITE VISIT?

Asking your policymaker to attend a site visit is one of the most effective ways to familiarize them with your work and show off your successes. It gives you the opportunity to get to know the policymaker better and build your relationship with them. A policymaker who has seen what you’re doing for themselves is more likely to champion your issue in the future. It also provides some great photo opportunities!

##### HOW DOES THE PROCESS WORK?

Policymakers receive many requests for site visits, but their ability to accept your invitation will depend on many factors, including the policymaker’s busy schedule. The first step is to settle on a date. It is important to have a date or a few dates in mind when you first approach the subject, but it’s also good to make sure the policymaker and their staff knows you can be flexible. If you’re inviting a legislator, it’s worth checking to see when the legislature is in session; recesses and weekends may be the easiest times to schedule a visit. As you work to determine a date, you should also develop an agenda for the visit and consider who else you will invite and how they will contribute to a successful visit. For more information on planning a site visit, please see page 46.

#### ASKING A POLICYMAKER TO WRITE AN OP-ED ON YOUR ISSUE

##### WHAT'S AN OP-ED?

Op-ed is an abbreviation for “opposite the editorial page” and can describe both the page itself and the opinion pieces that a newspaper publishes on the page facing the editorial page. Newspapers generally have a stable of op-ed columnists and regular contributors, but most also print op-eds written by outside authors. Editors may choose to balance their coverage of an issue by publishing op-eds that express opinions that differ from the ones found in its editorials. Op-eds may also be selected for their unique response or fresh perspective on a recent event or news story.

##### WHAT'S THE VALUE OF ASKING A POLICYMAKER TO WRITE AN OP-ED?

Asking your policymaker to write and submit an op-ed offers an excellent, high-impact opportunity for you to highlight your work and bring attention to a pressing health issue in the community. As is true of many asks, the process of working with the office staff to create an op-ed will ensure that they learn a lot about your efforts and your message.

##### WHEN SHOULD YOU ASK A POLICYMAKER TO WRITE AN OP-ED ON YOUR ISSUE?

Ask for an op-ed when you have a timely issue to bring to the public’s attention. How does it fit into current local or national debates? Find a “hook” on which to peg your issue—a recent national study on obesity, an announcement by the President of a new health priority, an event date or anniversary, or a continuing local or national news story. An op-ed from your policymaker could be particularly useful as you seek to build support or credibility within the community for a new project or fund-raising effort.

A word of caution: Even when an op-ed is signed by a policymaker, it’s often difficult to get one placed in a large city newspaper, especially those that are considered national outlets like the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Consider targeting smaller papers in the policymaker’s district or state, where you will have a greater chance for a successful placement. Also, don’t be offended if the policymaker does not readily agree to your request. Policymakers, too, have to balance the number of times they approach a news outlet and on which topics.

## ASKING FOR A CONGRESSIONAL RECORD STATEMENT

### WHAT'S THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD?

The Congressional Record is the published daily account of official proceedings and debate in the House and Senate chambers of the U.S. Congress.

### WHAT'S THE VALUE OF ASKING FOR A CONGRESSIONAL RECORD STATEMENT?

Asking your senator or representative to submit a formal statement about your work to the Congressional Record is a great ask. A Congressional Record statement can:

- Ensure the office learns more about your work simply through the act of drafting, editing and formally submitting the statement.
- Increase the likelihood that the member, him or herself, will become increasingly familiar with your work through reading and approving the statement and, on occasion, through personally reading the statement on the House or Senate floor.
- Provide a public statement of support for your organization you can reprint in full, quote in brochures and newsletters, highlight on your website and refer to in speeches.

### HOW DO I GO ABOUT ASKING FOR A CONGRESSIONAL RECORD STATEMENT?

You can ask for a Congressional Record statement in support of your work whether this is your first visit or you already have an established relationship with the member's office. This is an easy ask, meaning it does not require much work by the congressional office. A statement may be particularly useful to recognize a significant milestone for your work—a 20th anniversary, a grand opening, an award received. A timely statement also gives a member of Congress the opportunity to put a local face on a national issue.

### HOW DOES THE PROCESS WORK?

If you choose to ask for a Congressional Record statement, most offices will ask you to provide them with background information and draft language to build from. You don't need to have this language prepared when you make the ask, but you should provide it as part of your follow-up. Once you submit a draft, the office will make revisions. The legislative assistant who specializes in your issue area is likely to be the person editing the statement and sharing it with the member for review and final approval. The statement is then formally submitted by the member and becomes part of the official record of the Congress.

### WILL MY SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE READ THE STATEMENT ON THE HOUSE OR SENATE FLOOR?

Some statements are read but most are submitted directly to the Record. As the floor schedule is continually filled with debates and votes, with limited time for each member of Congress to speak on their priority issues, it may not always be possible for your member to read the statement aloud. The real goal is for the statement to become part of the official account of congressional proceedings and for the staff and your senator or representative to become better acquainted with the value of your work in the process.

### HOW CAN I MAKE THE MOST OF THIS ASK?

A Congressional Record statement supporting your work can be a great marketing tool. Post it on your website, refer to it in funding support letters, mention it in speeches and give framed copies to your staff or volunteers. You can also ask the staff person who worked with you on the Congressional Record statement to send you an official copy signed by the member of Congress who submitted it.

### WHAT ABOUT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL?

Many state and local legislatures have similar daily diaries, and requesting a lawmaker's statement about your work can offer the same value as a Congressional Record statement. The process for requesting a state or local statement is broadly similar but, before preparing a draft, double-check with the policymaker or staff member to confirm that the legislature has an official written record and to understand the rules.

# Identify an Ask

List the challenges and obstacles your program currently faces. What goals have not been met? What are the stumbling blocks to their achievement?

Are there any groups you are having trouble reaching that your policymaker might help you engage? (Business leaders, partners, community segments, clients)

List any upcoming events—celebrations, milestones, conferences, reports. Circle those that offer opportunities to involve your member of Congress.

Are there specific, nonlegislative ways your member can help? (Support for a federal grant application, help with a regulatory issue, getting attention for an important community issue)

# Identify an Ask

## LIST YOUR MEETINGS BELOW

## LINK YOUR ASK TO THEIR INTERESTS

## BRAINSTORM

	<p>What are this policymaker's interests? (Refer to the <i>Research Your Members of Congress</i> worksheet on page 7)</p>	<p>Use the notes you made above to jot down ideas about how this particular policymaker might become a champion of your work and further your goals.</p>	
MEMBER			
MEMBER			
MEMBER			
MEMBER			
MEMBER			

**NOTE:** Eliminate any asks linked to specific legislation, which includes asking for an appropriation or an earmark for your project. Those types of asks would constitute lobbying and are therefore off-limits for an RWJF-sponsored visit.

**EASY ASKS  
(RELATIONSHIP-BUILDERS)**

**CONNECTING ASKS**

**SITE VISIT**

Are there any “easy” asks, like a letter of support or a Congressional Record statement, that would be appropriate for this member?

How can this member use his or her influence to connect you with others? (A particular group, a congressional committee, the media?)

Will you invite this member or a staffer for a site visit?

# Sample Congressional Record Statement

June 22, 2004

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—SENATE

S7163

Education: 1974–1978, City College of the City University of New York B.A. degree, cum laude.

1978–1981, University of Pennsylvania Law School, J.D. degree.  
Bar Admittance: 1982, Pennsylvania.

and extend my best wishes for success in all his future ventures.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT  
OF 2003

grams to contribute approximately 315,000 volunteer hours per year—a service valued at nearly \$5.2 million.

But the value of Faith in Action is measured not by dollars and cents. Nor

## FAITH IN ACTION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, in the 21st century, advances in medicine are allowing Americans to live longer than ever before. Today, the average American will live to be over 76 years old. As the collective age of society increases, so does the need for increased help, care, and support, as long-term illnesses and the frailties of age become the rule, not the exception. Faith in Action volunteers play a crucial role in ensuring that help is there for neighbors in need.

Faith in Action is a nationwide, interfaith coalition that works to help people with long-term health needs or disabilities maintain their independence by providing assistance with daily activities. Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Faith in Action boasts 100,000 nationwide volunteers serving over 200,000 care recipients.

Through Faith in Action, Americans of every faith—including Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Jews and Muslims—work together to improve the lives of their neighbors in need. Faith in Action volunteers help others maintain their independence by doing simple things: watering flowers, shopping for groceries, taking people to the doctor, and simply listening. Sometimes they open doors that people can't open on their own.

Perry moved to Nevada, where he became a successful prosecutor in the Washoe County District Attorney's Office. After several years, he rose to the position of Deputy District Attorney for the Criminal Division.

In 1976, Mr. Perry joined the law firm of Laxalt and Berry, and a few years later he formed a partnership with Richard Davenport. He ventured out on his own in 1991, forming Robert H. Perry, Ltd., and concentrated on civil trial work.

Since then Mr. Perry has dedicated himself to representing average citizens who have been harmed by the wrongful actions of others. Many times the party that did the harm was much more powerful than the victim—but in our legal system, it is possible for ordinary people to get justice, thanks to lawyers like Mr. Perry.

In 2001, Mr. Perry represented a young girl whose medical treatment had been delayed because the treating physician thought she was complaining in order to receive more painkillers. But in fact, she was really sick. When surgery was finally performed on this girl, only three feet of her small intestine remained. Today, and for the rest of her life, she must receive her nourishment intravenously.

Mr. Perry fought for her and she won the largest verdict for medical malpractice in Nevada history.

This is just an example of the kind of battles that Robert Perry wages on behalf of his clients. I salute him for his selection as Trial Lawyer of the Year,

minds as well.

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In my home State of Iowa, over 2,100 dedicated volunteers work in local pro-

grams to contribute approximately 315,000 volunteer hours per year—a service valued at nearly \$5.2 million.

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### THE CRISIS IN HAITI

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the lamentable situation in Haiti. After suffering political upheaval and widespread violence over the last few months, the Haitian people are now facing even more desperate circumstances.

During the last 2 weeks of May, floods devastated major sections of Haiti and parts of the Dominican Republic. The death toll in Haiti has reached nearly 2,600 people not including the missing and medical personnel expect that number to climb higher as the waters recede and reclamation efforts become possible.

In the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe, aid workers, Haitian officials, and foreign troops—including U.S. soldiers scrambled to prevent the crisis from worsening. They have been delivering emergency supplies of food and water, building temporary housing, and working to prevent the spread of disease.

I am concerned, however, by reports that the efforts are solely under-funded