



COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP & ADVOCACY

Demystifying Educating National, State, and Local Policy
Makers to Welcome Refugees and Newcomers

How to advocate for Congress to expand our capacity to welcome
refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants

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How to Use this Toolkit

The Community Sponsorship & Advocacy Toolkit aims to equip and empower community sponsors to effectively advocate for the expansion of welcoming policies for refugees, asylum seekers, and newcomers. By providing resources, actionable strategies, this toolkit seeks to demystify the advocacy process and empower newcomers and community members to work together to foster transformative change at national, state, and local policy levels.

Goals of this Toolkit

- Offer a clear and accessible guide to advocacy, ensuring that community sponsors can easily grasp and understand the intricacies of the process.
- Education: Equip sponsors with the knowledge and tools necessary to engage with policy makers at all levels of government.
- Community Empowerment: Equip sponsors with strategies and confidence to use their positionality and power within their community to advocate for more equitable communities for all.
- Importance of Centering Impacted Voices: Emphasize the significance of centering the narratives, expertise and experiences of newcomers, highlighting how their voices drive advocacy efforts and contribute to policy discussions essential for belonging and transformation.

Laying the Groundwork

Advocacy goes beyond the legislative process; it involves a community that values the richness of belonging. Successful advocacy inspires a broader commitment to fostering spaces where every individual feels a deep sense of belonging, experiences equity, and is embraced within an inclusive community.

- **Newcomers**—for the purposes of this toolkit the term “newcomers” represents: refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and other displaced populations.
- **Equity**—Equity acknowledges the diversity of experiences and circumstances that individuals bring to a community. While equality seeks to treat everyone the same, equity recognizes that fairness and justice often require tailored approaches. This toolkit underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by newcomers. By prioritizing equity, community sponsors can dismantle systemic barriers and ensure that advocacy efforts are not only inclusive but also responsive to the diverse realities of newcomers.
- **Inclusion**—Inclusion involves inviting diverse voices to the table, creating spaces where everyone’s perspective is valued, and fostering a culture of mutual respect. Inclusion allows for centering voices, experiences and needs of impacted communities, including children and youth voices. Specific needs, including age, gender, and diversity, must be considered. The toolkit emphasizes that inclusion should not be conditional; it should transcend control and power dynamics. Inclusion exists when every voice contributes to the collective story of the community. Intentional inclusion seeks to nurture a community where differences are not only acknowledged but celebrated, enriching the advocacy process with varied perspectives.



- **Belonging**—Belonging acknowledges that individuals thrive when they actively contribute and feel a sense of ownership and meaningful roles in their communities. This toolkit recognizes that true belonging involves individuals collectively shaping the spaces they occupy, fostering a shared identity, and taking shared responsibility for positive change. Fostering belonging creates spaces where every member feels seen, valued, and an integral part of the community.

Centering Refugee and Impacted Voices

At the core of this toolkit is a commitment to centering the expertise, experiences and voices of refugees and newcomers, recognizing their narratives as an essential catalyst for driving systemic change. When refugees and newcomers uplift their stories, challenges, and triumphs, they can not only influence policy shifts but also create a transformation in community perspectives that spark a change in collective viewpoints, empathy and understanding.

The emotional labor of sharing personal stories can be significant. It's crucial to acknowledge and address the toll it may take on individuals repeatedly revisiting experiences of displacement and trauma. Alongside amplifying voices, it is equally important to prioritize the well-being of those sharing their narratives. Providing a supportive framework involves creating spaces that validate emotional experiences and offering resources for psychological support, such as counseling services or support groups are essential.

By combining robust community sponsorship efforts with the narratives of the refugee and newcomer experience, bridges are built that connect people, deconstruct stereotypes, and co-create inclusive spaces where every individual belongs and contributes to the collective community. These collective efforts foster a more inclusive, equitable society, where refugee/newcomer voices play a pivotal role in co-creating and shaping a shared vision of belonging and community transformation. We encourage and support different ways to capture the experience, challenges, best practices, and contributions of refugees and immigrants.

Promoting Spaces of Meaningful Participation and Engagement

Promoting spaces of meaningful participation and engagement is not just a call for representation but an invitation to empower every voice. It is crucial to foster an environment that not only encourages but actively supports diverse methods of capturing the nuanced experiences, challenges, best practices, and contributions of refugees and immigrants. This commitment rests on the unwavering belief in inclusivity, recognizing that every narrative contributes to the vibrant tapestry of our shared humanity.

Beyond the surface, our advocacy extends to the holistic well-being of those who courageously share their stories. In tandem with robust community sponsorship efforts, we emphasize a mindful approach to the emotional well-being of advocates. This conscientious strategy is the cornerstone upon which bridges are built – bridges that connect people, deconstruct stereotypes, and co-create spaces where every individual feels an unshakable sense of belonging and actively contributes to the collective community narrative.

These collective efforts reach beyond dismantling barriers; they lay the foundation for a society that is not only inclusive but fosters belonging for all community members. By championing an atmosphere of mindfulness and support, we ensure that the voices of refugees and newcomers not only shape but define a shared vision of belonging, catalyzing transformative change within our communities. In these spaces of genuine participation, every individual becomes an architect of positive change, and their stories weave into the fabric of a society that values and celebrates the unique contributions of all its members.

Building Belonging as Catalyst for Transformative Change

Fostering belonging is the very heart of community resilience, social justice, and sustainable development. Regardless of the challenge, creating environments where individuals and communities feel connected, worthy, and purposeful is integral to the transformative work CWS envisions. There is an urgent need to rebuild and strengthen the fabric of communities. With epidemics of loneliness and anxiety on the rise, dehumanizing divisive rhetoric, global conflicts and increased racial tensions, fostering belonging becomes a catalyst for transformative change. Empowering individuals to collaborate, innovate, and co-create, allows communities to rediscover the potential for growth, equity, and the creation of a more just and sustainable future for all. Neglecting to build towards fostering true belonging reinforces societal fractures, hindering collective progress toward a world where all have food, voice, and a safe place to call home.

Interested in Advocacy Training?

Email refugeewelcome@cwsglobal.org to inquire about upcoming advocacy trainings and opportunities.



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The Power of Advocacy

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is a deliberate process to directly and indirectly influence decision-makers to address the root causes of injustice, fulfill human rights, and promote the well-being of all. Advocacy often focuses on experts working to influence policy makers, but it is also critical to engage leaders with lived experience to shape the public narrative and political will, influence policy makers and people in power, and change hearts and minds on important newcomer rights issues. Advocacy helps to amplify voices of impacted communities and includes activities like public education, relationship-building with policy makers, voter registration, and media engagement. An important piece to the advocacy puzzle is building collective power to win concrete improvements in people's lives. By engaging and training refugees, former refugees, and immigrants through community organizing and advocacy, we help them build more welcoming communities in their states and localities. Ultimately, advocacy can lead to systemic, lasting, positive change that helps people integrate and thrive in their communities.

Who You Are. Why You Care. What You Want.

In the journey of advocacy, a fundamental principle is maintaining an unwavering commitment to staying knowledgeable of the issues affecting the groups we champion, regardless of our position on the ladder of engagement. Regardless of where we stand, be it amplifying messages on social media or organizing legislative visits, the crucial mindset to cultivate is a profound understanding of the change we strive to achieve.

It is more important than ever to meet with your [local](#), [state](#), and [national](#) policy makers to educate them about the vital role that immigrants and all newcomers play in your communities. Recognizing that change is a gradual process, these interactions should be seen as integral steps in an ongoing journey — a continuum of gathering and disseminating information, fostering relationships, and executing advocacy strategies with a keen eye on the overarching transformation we seek. Meetings with policy makers should be viewed as part of a continuing process of gathering and sharing information, building relationships, and developing and carrying out advocacy strategies. We need our national, state, and local elected leaders to hold the administration accountable and proactively seek policies that have a positive impact on people's lives.

It is important to follow along with the latest news, policies, and programs that impact communities we serve and work alongside. To stay up to date on the change CWS is advocating for you can subscribe to our advocacy alerts [here](#).

Be an Advocate

Developing relationships with and educating policy makers is necessary if we want to see welcoming policies and attitudes toward newcomers and their family members. A powerful constituent visit to educate policy makers involves impacted communities and allies who join together. Having a team of refugee leaders, faith leaders, employers, and other community members who meet regularly is essential in building meaningful relationships with policy makers. It is important that policy makers understand that their constituents care about refugees and that refugees and their families are their constituents — they live, work, and contribute in their communities, may obtain U.S. citizenship, and may vote.

Advocacy is a dynamic force that empowers and equips newcomers to shape public narratives, influence political will, sway policy makers, and transform hearts and minds on crucial issues affecting the rights of refugees and immigrants. This long-term, multifaceted approach encompasses public education, relationship-building with policy makers, voter registration, and media engagement. By amplifying the voices

of impacted communities, advocacy becomes a catalyst for systemic, enduring positive change, fostering integration and thriving communities.

We know that change doesn't happen overnight, so it is important to embody perseverance. Showing up consistently, even when immediate results may not be evident, is crucial, as it lays the groundwork for transformative change.

Your Voice Matters

Your story as a refugee or immigrant, part of a family of refugees or immigrants, or supporter of refugee or humanitarian protections is your most important qualification as an advocate. Talk about the way your community welcomes refugees and the positive contributions they make to your community. Tell policy makers that you care about refugees and the U.S. resettlement and humanitarian programs, and they will increasingly vote to support humane and moral policies that strengthen access to permanent protection.

Engaging National and State Elected Leaders

At the national and state levels, individuals who oppose refugee and newcomer rights make their opinions heard loudly and frequently to policy makers. These groups utilize anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, anti-family, and anti-Muslim rhetoric and draft legislation to engender fear and foster hostile atmospheres for newcomers and has become part of a broader white supremacist agenda to criminalize BIPOC communities. Anti-immigrant advocates also use racist, "anti-poverty," and "tough on crime" rhetoric as dog whistles for others to support anti-immigration; for more information on the CWS racial justice platform, [click here](#). If policy makers will support positive legislation and oppose proposals that will hurt newcomers and violate the values of welcome and hospitality, then policy makers need to hear from refugees and newcomers, their families, and supportive community members.

Engaging Local Policy Makers

There are positive proposals that local elected officials can adopt to affirm the importance of refugee resettlement and foster communities of welcome. City, municipal, and other local councils and commissions need to hear that their communities stand ready to welcome and help refugees and newcomers integrate and thrive. Urge local leaders to adopt welcoming resolutions that extend hospitality to refugees and all newcomers.



Ladder of Engagement

Each person has their own journey towards becoming a volunteer, leader, advocate or organizer. Along the continuum of action is a ladder of engagement, in which people are able to do what their time and skills allow. The below list of activities is designed to give people tools to be able to further their ability to take action as capacity allows. Traditionally, in advocacy and organizing, we work to move leaders further along a ladder of engagement.

Part 1: Amplify on Social Media

Social media is a great way to create public awareness and to engage more people on an issue you care about. It's helpful to have a basic knowledge base of the tools that can help spread the message farther and be seen by more people.

For a given event, holiday, action or issue, there will be specific hashtags, which make it seen by anyone else who uses the same hashtag. It can also be helpful to tag partner organizations as a way to include them and to see if they also want to reshare.

There is always the opportunity to also tag a decision maker, including: city council, the mayor, state or federal legislators, and the U.S. President.

Find your [Senators/Representatives'](#) Twitter (X) handles and tweet at them. Follow the organizations and tweet at them using the @ sign.

Here are some examples below:

- This #WorldRefugeeDay, we celebrate the diversity and resilience #refugees bring to our communities! #RefugeesWelcome @senator/rep @potus @CWS_global
- Refugee #resettlement means not only saving lives, but also building inclusive communities across the US. #WorldRefugeeDay
- My community stands with our immigrant neighbors as DACA comes under threat & call on @Senator / Rep @partneorg to pass#DreamActNow and pathway to citizenship for all
- @legislator Three ways you can invest in our capacity to welcome:
 - Support refugee assistance and humanitarian funding
 - Support funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement
 - Invest in United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) staffing to address processing backlogs

Part 2: Call or Email National, State, and Local Elected Leaders

A simple way to support refugee advocacy is to use CWS action alerts and share them with your networks. [These alerts](#) provide an updated state of play on our key issues and a Phone-to-Action tool to allow you and others to easily send emails and make phone calls to your U.S. Representative and Senators. CWS action alerts also include sample social media posts, graphics, and additional resources to learn more. For example, [this action alert](#) from November 13, 2023 discusses newcomer funding priorities to protect the nation's capacity to welcome (also copied below).

Your state and local leaders need to hear the same message. To contact your state and local officials, visit: [contactingcongress.org/local](https://www.contactingcongress.org/local) and [usa.gov/elected-officials](https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials). To tweet your state and local officials, click to find the twitter handles for your [governor](#) and [state legislators](#). CWS also launches action alerts that target state legislators to support state-specific campaigns and for state legislators to engage in national campaigns.

You can track our latest alerts by signing up to receive them [here](#).

Part 3: Write and Place Your Own Media

Publishing opinion editorials (op-eds) and letters to the editor (LTEs) are a great way to get the attention of your Members of Congress. But first, you need to write a piece that tells your story – not just the facts.

How to Engage the Media

- **Respond to Recent Reports:** Find a news article or story that relates to the issue. Make sure you are responding to a recent story or topic – no more than a few days old.
- **Ask for Action:** Make a specific ask to specific policy makers. Mentioning your Members of Congress by name is an important way to make sure they see it.
- **Find the Facts:** Illustrate your argument with one or two facts with citations. Statistics can be helpful in moderation, but too many statistics can be confusing.
- **Tie It Together:** Bring in your personal connection or moral approach to the issue. State your connections to the community as they are relevant to the points you're making.

Tips for Submitting Op-Eds or LTE

- **Keep it short:** Newspapers are most likely to publish letters to the editor that are short and make one succinct point (that is supported with facts or quotes from validators!). Check the newspaper you're submitting to for a word limit. If you can't find a limit, write no more than 200 words for LTEs or 700 words for op-eds.
- **Write from your own voice:** Your piece is more likely to be published if it comes from your voice. Don't be afraid to tell your story and to appeal to the audience from the heart as well as the head.
- **Submit it to the newspaper:** Submit the letter directly to the newspaper (most newspapers have an online submissions page) and follow up by phone or email if you don't get a response within a week or two. Put the letter in the body of the email to make it easy for the editorial staff to read. As you submit your letter, don't miss an opportunity to build a relationship with staff. To find local newspapers and submit your piece, visit: <http://act.fcni.org/lte/lte/>.

Report Back

If you're published, let your partners know so it can be shared and tracked. Also, make sure to email your media piece directly to your Members of Congress and call their DC office to continue the conversation.

Part 4: Organize or Attend Legislative Visits with Elected Leaders

Advocacy can lead to systemic, lasting, positive changes that help communities thrive. There are many ways to engage with r members of Congress on newcomer priorities. See below for a step-by-step guide to organize and participate in legislative visits with elected leaders.

How to Set Up Advocacy Meetings

To set up a meeting, call your [Members of Congress](#), [state officials](#), or [local officials](#). Explain who you are, what organization you're with (if any), and that you would like to meet with the official (in person or virtually). You can also send a formal email requesting a meeting with the official and/or their staff (sample email below). Include in the request how the meeting will take place (in person at their offices? Virtual by phone, Zoom?). If you don't hear back in a few days, send a reminder email or call again. You can also use district staff for assistance, especially if there is someone in the office with whom you have a relationship. Remember, if the official(s) themselves are unavailable, always request to meet with the staff member who works on immigration and housing (sometimes multiple staff). You can find contact information and the location of your members of Congress' offices using [this link for the House](#) and [this link for the Senate](#).

When you contact the office to request a virtual visit by telephone or video conference, you can ask if they have a conference line, or set up your own conference line for everyone to use. Some offices are very comfortable with videoconferencing technology, but others are not. Keep that in mind when making your request, and make sure the office knows that you are available to connect in whatever way they prefer. Options for holding a remote meeting include setting up an account with [freeconferencecall.com](https://www.freeconferencecall.com), [Zoom](https://zoom.us), [Google Hangouts](https://hangouts.google.com), [Apple Facetime](https://www.apple.com/facetime), or any platform with which you are familiar.

Sample Email to Request Appointment

Dear [Name],

My name is [name] and I am from [City, State]. As a constituent of [the official's name], I would like to request an appointment with you and the [official's name] on [DATE, TIME] to talk about ways we can strengthen our capacity to welcome refugees and other newcomers. [Insert preference around in person or virtual visit, and if virtual, indicate which platform you'll use to conduct this meeting]. I expect to be joined by [insert number] people.

Please feel free to contact me at [phone number and email] should you have any questions. I look forward to this visit!

Thank you,
[Name]

How to Prepare for Advocacy Meetings

- 1. Identify the Issue:** This should always be done with ample input and collaboration from impacted communities. This is often done through taking surveys or holding listening sessions to find out what are the hardest pressing issues facing the community. Always take into account the political context. Choose a campaign that reflects your values and is an important step toward a more welcoming environment.
- 2. Learn About your National, State, and Local Elected Officials:** Identify who your elected officials are depending on the level of government - are you planning to meet to discuss local and state refugee and immigration priorities or are you wanting to discuss national refugee protection and resettlement issues? If the latter, are your U.S. Senators & Representative in congressional leadership: the [Senate](#) or [House](#) Judiciary Committees, [Senate](#) or [House](#) Appropriations Committees, [Senate](#) or [House](#) Homeland Security Committees, or [Senate](#) Foreign Relations / [House](#) Foreign Affairs Committees? If so, they have jurisdiction over various aspects of housing efforts that could impact refugees and newcomers. Even if they are not in leadership or on these committees, they can still be champions. To learn more about your governor, state legislators, mayor, and local officials, click [here](#). You must consider the following questions:
 - What have they done about refugee and newcomer issues? Has the Member put out statements, authored op-eds, or been supportive of refugees/immigrants? If they have, be sure to thank them and their staff. If they have a record of not supporting refugees/immigrants, find out why. Build talking points to address those concerns.
 - What issues are of interest to them? Do they often speak out on certain issues? This can help determine what approach to take when discussing refugees/immigrants in the meeting. What did they do before they were elected to Congress? This can impact their perspective. It is the job of a successful advocate to discuss topics and frame issues in a way that will resonate with them.
- 3. Assemble a Team:** An ideal team consists of refugees/newcomers, case workers, faith leaders, business leaders, and community leaders who can all share in the planning, outreach, and coordination of advocacy actions and speak to the diversity of support for refugee resettlement and housing needs. Meet to discuss current relationships with policy makers, goals and ideas, and to plan for a successful meeting. See below for more information around team-building.

- 4. Identify Strategy:** A campaign without a strategy is likely to be ineffective. It's imperative to work together in a collaborative way to build community support around a winning strategy. Check out these important components:
- **Identify goals and vision:** Identify the shared goal and vision. Work toward a long term goal with attainable short term and medium term goals. Goals should always be winnable! Make sure to map out your goals first.
 - **Identify allies:** List potential partners and make an outreach plan.
 - **Identify targets:** List potential legislators; you need to consider potential supports as well as opponents.
 - **Identify other actions to strengthen your advocacy meetings:** Action alerts, media, and rallies etc.
 - **Prepare leave behind materials:** For example, here are refugee housing policy leave behinds [here](#)— which will include core materials like these [congressional policy asks](#), [state and local policy asks](#), and other [innovative policy solutions](#). Please contact Thea Holcomb at tholcomb@cwsglobal.org for the most relevant/current resources.
- 5. Develop a plan for the meetings:**
- **The Facilitator** will kick off the meeting by introducing your group, explaining the purpose for the meeting, and providing time for each person attending to briefly introduce themselves. Make sure each participant introduces the organization they represent or their connection to refugee/immigration issues. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.
 - **The Personal Story** is key to every meeting. Someone should be present who is either an impacted person themselves or has worked closely with and been impacted. Telling this story will show how peoples' lives and communities are enriched through welcoming.
 - **Specific Issue Points**—It will be helpful to use prepared notes, resources such as this toolkit, and leave behind materials to refer to during the meeting. Split the issue points between members of the group, preferably in the way it most impacts them/people they know.
 - **The Ask** is the critical part when you ask "Will you be a champion refugee & newcomer solutions, such as [insert policy asks]?" Listen carefully and ask for clarification if their response is vague. Be sure to note their policy responses.
- 6. Debrief with your group:** It's important to debrief after the meeting. As a group, ask: what did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? How did we work together as a team? What are the next steps? Share any feedback and make sure to track the meeting using [this simple google form](#).
- 7. Follow up:** Make sure to send a thank you email to the staff after the meeting with any information they asked for and any other relevant information you think would be helpful. Inviting the staff and/or Members to an upcoming event to meet with refugees/newcomers is an excellent next step!

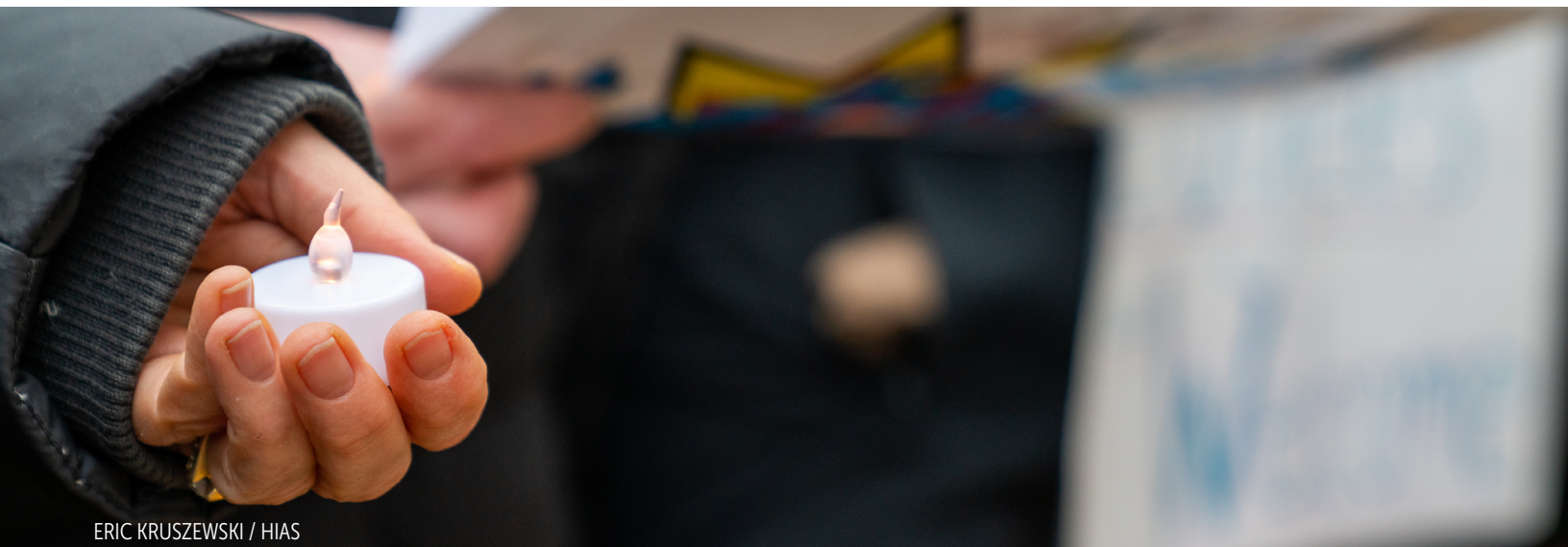
Value of Team Building

The art of team building is a critical component to advocacy. Team building brings together diverse voices – such as first-generation immigrants, faith leaders, resettlement staff, refugee leaders, concerned community members and others – who speak to the importance of welcome and helping refugee and newcomer families integrate and thrive from several perspectives. This is how to get started in creating and sustaining teams of people who can take action together for change.

Part 5: Organize or Join a Community Event, Action, or Vigil

Tips and Step-by-Step Guide

- Be clear about your goals, what you want to accomplish, and how it fits in with your broader advocacy strategy
- Set a target of how many people you hope to join the event
- Coordinate with partner organizations, local coalitions, faith communities, refugee agencies or immigrants' rights groups and always include community members who are impacted by the issue.
- Identify the core leaders and speakers, and work alongside impacted leaders to create space for them to tell their story and be part of the strategic call to action
- Consider inviting elected officials including Representatives, Senators, City Council Members, or the Mayor
- Identify the best location for the event, which is generally somewhere central in a symbolic memorial, state capitol, park or city hall or if it's a forum, a community hall or place of worship that is accessible
- Apply for any permits needed for the location; reserve or order any equipment you'll need such as microphones, cameras, banners, candles, projectors; and make sure you can access electrical outlets
- Choose a time of day best for attendance and media -- most news reports take place at 5-6 PM and 9-10 PM, so a few hours before those time blocks is best for press events.
- Promote the event through social media, public service announcement, flyers, websites, and congregation bulletins
- Agree on messaging and talking points
- If an action or vigil, bring signs that are consistent with your messaging and agreed upon ahead of time
- Assign specific talking points to each speaker and ensure they have time limits, if its a more educational event, create an agenda that includes question and answer, and/or small group activities
- Invite the media by issuing a media advisory and following up with a press release after the event.
- Invite participants to be part of further action and advocacy by writing and calling the White House and their Representatives and Senators
- Make sure to have a signup sheet and get contact information from people willing to sign up, this will help with follow up actions to come.
- Make sure to debrief the action or event with your planning team and talk about next steps.



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Additional Resources

CWS Advocacy Webpages

- CWS action alerts containing a contact Congress tool with a sample script, sample social media posts, policy resources, talking points, and more, please visit: <https://cwsglobal.org/take-action/action-alerts/>
- For CWS press releases and public statements, please visit: <https://cwsglobal.org/for-the-press/press-releases/>
- To find out more about CWS Advocacy, Policy and Community Organizing work, please visit: <https://cwsglobal.org/our-work/united-states/advocacy-and-organizing/>

Pre-Recorded Trainings

- Refugee Welcome Collective hosts bi-weekly Lunch and Learns (LnL). To watch a LnL on Sponsorship and Advocacy, please visit: [Community Sponsorship to Community Advocacy](#)
- To watch a training session from the CWS Advocacy team, please visit: NDT: [CWS Advocacy](#) (password: 1?#GUpuS)
- Refugee Welcome Collective Webinar: [Refugee Leadership Development and Community Organizing](#)

Examples of Advocacy Toolkits

- [Toolkit: Demystifying Federal Funding & Appropriations Advocacy for Refugees and Newcomers](#) (November - December 2023)
- [Refugee Housing Toolkit](#) (June - August 2023)
- [World Refugee Day Toolkit & Top Five Actions for World Refugee Day Toolkit](#) (June 2023)
- [August Recess Toolkit](#) (August 2022)

Key Coalitions of which CWS is a Member

- [Interfaith Immigration Coalition](#)
- [Refugee Council USA](#)
- [Value Our Families](#)
- [Welcome with Dignity](#)
- [Evacuate Our Allies](#)