

Indivisible States: Empowering the States to Resist the Trump Agenda

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Introduction

In 2017, we saw the birth of a movement of hundreds of thousands of local activists who started organizing with their neighbors and participating in our democracy to resist the cruel and hate-filled Trump agenda. But the power of an activated constituency shouldn't stop at our federal representatives in Washington. **We have elected officials making decisions on our behalf at all levels of government** — from our local school board to our city council and state legislature. The strategy outlined in the original [Indivisible Guide](#) describes, in general terms, how to engage in the democratic process; those tactics can be applied to anyone that we elect to represent our interests in government. For the last two years, we've followed the stories of dozens of Indivisible groups across the country that have realized that their constituent power has more leverage locally, and have already begun taking their activism to the state level to create change in their communities.

The GOP has been using a state-centered strategy to take and hold power for almost half a century. Conservative organizations like [ALEC](#) have been [drafting dangerous model legislation and ushering](#) it through statehouses across the country for over 40 years. Then a decade ago, GOP strategists laid out a plan called [REDMAP](#) (Redistricting Majority Project) to take back power through state legislatures after the 2010 Census — and it worked, *dramatically*. In 2010, there were 9 Republican and 16 Democratic “trifectas” (where a single party controls the governorship and both chambers of the state legislature). In 2018, Republicans fully control 26 state governments, while Democrats control 8.

By controlling state governments, conservatives have been able to suppress voting rights, control redistricting, and maintain power in Congress via gerrymandering. By drawing districts in their favor, the GOP has been able to consistently win and hold a disproportionate share of Congressional seats relative to the number of votes that they win. For example, the GOP retained the majority in the House of Representatives in 2014 despite receiving 1.4 million fewer votes. While we don't believe in the GOP attempt to fundamentally undermine democracy, there are lessons we can learn from the Republicans' strategy of focusing on states. **Progressives have largely ignored state legislatures to our detriment.** Now is our chance to take them back.

This document is for Indivisible groups and members who are interested in using their constituent power to influence their state's policy agenda. We hope to demystify how states can resist the Trump administration and how to develop strategies and tactics for impactful advocacy.

Summary

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 state legislatures can resist the Trump agenda

We examine the opportunities that state legislatures provide to resist Trump and provide a progressive vision for the country, the tools that states have at their disposal to achieve these aims, and advocacy strategies for states with different political landscapes.

CHAPTER 2: How state legislatures work

Each state is entirely unique. In this chapter, we outline what motivates your state legislators, the similarities and differences in the policymaking process across various state legislatures, and resources for you to learn about your own state.

CHAPTER 3: Organizing your state to win

To maximize your effectiveness in state advocacy, you should organize both in your local community and across your state. By combining your collective Indivisible power, you can more effectively exert influence on your state

legislature. But remember: in addition to organizing within the Indivisible movement, it's critical to build coalitions and partnerships with existing organizations and impacted communities.

CHAPTER 4: Defining a strategy in your state

Once you learn about your state and organize, it's time to think strategically and build an impactful campaign around state legislation. We provide some suggestions for how to prioritize the hundreds of bills moving in your state's legislature, how to think about and plan your advocacy efforts strategically, and how to track bills as they move through the legislative process.

CHAPTER 5: Tactics for state legislative advocacy

Your activism toolbox is full of ways to make impact at the state level. We describe the key tactics that you and your group, as constituents, can use to great effect to impact the legislative committee process, lobby your legislators, and get media attention.

Chapter 1. How state legislatures can resist the Trump Agenda

Regardless of the strategy we take at the federal level, there remain important opportunities for constituents to act both defensively and proactively at the state level. There are even some issues that we can better address at the state level — issues like redistricting, voting rights, abortion access, police violence, and driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants.

States are often able to act more quickly than the federal government, which means that for the next few years, they will be the primary vehicle for positive progressive change — as well as being absolutely critical for long term progressive powerbuilding. In short, we need to conduct effective advocacy in our home states if we are ever going to achieve the transformational changes that we want to see.

How are states critical for the resistance?

- 1. States can resist the Trump agenda.** In a political climate where the federal government is controlled by an opposing party that is dead-set on attacking our values, it is critical that we exercise our power where we have the most *leverage*, which for some of us is actually at the *state*

level. The implementation of federal policies often falls to the states, and many of the Trump administration's harmful policies can be directly countered by state action. State legislatures can also proactively restore protections that have been undone by the Trump administration.

- 2. States allow us to go on offense.** State policy allows the progressive movement to do more than just play defense — it allows us to demonstrate the ideals that we as progressives stand for: a clean environment, economic justice, health care for all, racial equity, a true representative democracy, gender and sexual equity, and civil rights. Enacting truly progressive policies is a form of resistance that isn't possible in Washington for now because, as long as Trump is still in the White House, he won't sign anything we want.
- 3. States are the model for progressivism.** State legislatures are often the laboratory for leading edge policy change. Ideally, we would like our progressive ideals cemented into strong federal law, but we often need to prove their success at a more local level to build the evidence base and momentum for federal change. If we can successfully implement legislation based on progressive ideals at the state level, we provide a model for other state and national legislators to follow our lead.
- 4. State advocacy is necessary to “unrig” the system.** The electoral system has been purposefully and unfairly stacked against Democrats at the state level via voter suppression and gerrymandering. To fully unrig the system, we'll need to address many of these issues at the state level.
- 5. Constituents often have much more leverage at the state level.** For a number of reasons, state legislators are less likely than Members of Congress to hear from their constituents on a given issue, and much more likely to hear from corporate and special interest lobbyists. However, this presents an opportunity: because state legislators often aren't hearing directly from their constituents, a small amount of engagement can make a huge difference. A typical U.S. House member has around 700,000 constituents; a state legislator represents as few as 3,291 constituents. Due to this, as few as 100 coordinated calls to a state legislator's office can get noticed and make an impact on their decisions.

What tools can states use to resist Trump?

- **State legislation.** State legislatures can pass laws that advance progressive ideals or restore protections undone by Trump. In order to become law, legislation must be introduced, debated, and voted on by elected state representatives and signed by the Governor. For example, after the Trump administration opened our coasts to offshore drilling and repealed net neutrality, states have been considering legislation that would ban drilling off of their coasts and restore the free and open internet.
- **Gubernatorial executive orders.** Much like presidential executive orders, governors are often able to take some actions unilaterally via executive order. Executive orders do not require legislative approval, though they are subject to legislative review in some states. For example, after the FCC repealed net neutrality, governors from multiple states signed executive orders that would prevent their state government from doing business with any internet service provider that was not net-neutral.
- **Attorney general lawsuits.** States' attorneys general have been racking up lawsuits against the Trump administration left and right in an attempt to protect their residents from the harmful policies being implemented in Washington. In 2017 alone, California sued the Trump administration 24 times.
- **Ballot initiatives.** Ballot initiatives allow voters to bypass the legislature and vote on legislation or constitutional amendments directly at the ballot box. By gathering a certain number of petition signatures (the number varies by state), constituents can either propose brand new legislation or hold a referendum (citizen vote) on recently passed legislation. In both cases, the decision is placed before the voters. Ballot initiatives are a tool available in 24 states.

How can different states strategically resist Trump?

As we'll outline in the next section, no two states are exactly alike. Depending on the partisan composition of your state legislature, you may need to pursue one of a few different strategies for your state advocacy.

Blue state victories add pressure on Congress to advance issues

Blue states can serve as a testing ground for new ideas, and victories at the state level can help build momentum for eventual federal adoption of an idea. Blue states are the places where we can advance progressive priorities like bold renewable energy standards, universal access to health care, sanctuary protections for undocumented immigrants, money bail reform, a real living minimum wage, ending police violence, and lots of other things. If you live in a blue state, consider working on *bold* progressive policies that will move the needle to the left and restore protections that the Trump administration has taken away. **There are 14 Democratic trifecta states** where both chambers of the legislature and the governorship is under Democratic control (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington).

Purple states come in many different flavors

Some states may have one party in control of both chambers of the legislature, but the other party in control of the governorship . In other states, the two chambers of the legislatures may be controlled by different parties. The strategy for your advocacy may vary based on the exact nature of the partisan makeup of your legislature and the margins of party control. **There are 13 states with split control** of legislative chambers and/or governorships (Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin).

- **With split chambers and the GOP in control by a small margin**, you may be able to pressure a handful of selected Republican targets to flip and vote the way you want. Virginia Indivisibles successfully flipped four Republican state senators in favor of Medicaid expansion in 2018 and were able to secure health care for 400,000 Virginians!
- **In a state with a red legislature and a blue governor**, you should make sure to pressure your Democratic governor to veto any bad legislation, and encourage him or her to act via gubernatorial executive order on certain issues that are within their power.
- **In a state with a blue legislature and a red governor**, it's possible (and often likely) that the Republican governor will veto important

progressive legislation. It's critical in that case to try to pass bills with a veto-proof majority, which isn't always possible (but has been in some states, like Maryland). A Republican governor in a primarily blue state may also be receptive to media and constituent pressure around certain issues.

Red trifecta states have been central to the GOP strategy

For decades, organizations like [ALEC](#) have pushed regressive legislation to restrict the rights of their residents and entrench GOP power through voter suppression and gerrymandering. These attacks on our democracy didn't start with Trump — they've been tested on a smaller scale in red states over the past few decades.

The results have been damaging for democracy and deeply harmful to marginalized communities. If you live in a red trifecta state, you know what we mean: your legislature has likely already passed bad bills that suppress the vote and harm the most vulnerable members of your community — things like reducing access to the polls; voter suppression through ID laws that seek to further disenfranchise people of color; restricting access to abortion; removing protections for the LGBTQ+ community; and attacks on immigrant communities.

It's absolutely critical to show up in solidarity with those communities to fight back and push for reforms that would undo the GOP's attacks on the democratic system. Since you'll be exercising your power more locally, your chances of successfully playing defense and defeating bad legislation is much higher. Furthermore, advocacy and electoral work go hand in hand; you can make inroads by working on state legislative elections to slowly change the composition of your legislature and make it less red over time.

There are 22 Republican trifecta states where Republicans control both chambers of the legislature and the governorship (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, Wyoming).

Chapter 2. How state legislatures work

If you know how one state legislature works... then you know how one state legislature works. State legislatures are like miniature Congresses — but no two are exactly alike. This section will highlight how state legislators think, and the similarities and differences between state legislatures.

What motivates your state legislators?

- **State legislators care about re-election.** Just like your federal representatives, your state legislators are elected by their constituents. Therefore, they need *your vote* in order to remain in (or win) office. This is the primary source of your power.
- **State legislators care about passing bills.** Legislators often consider the number of bills they get signed into law as a measure of their success. This can be problematic because it can drive a culture of compromise that drives them to water down otherwise good bills so the legislators to claim a win. Sometimes legislators need pressure to hold strong against bad amendments, not just to vote the right way on the final bill.
- **State legislators often are not used to hearing from constituents.** With some exceptions (such as when a controversial bill is moving), state legislatures do not receive much media attention — which means that many constituents do not know what is going on. As a result, people don't usually engage in the state legislative process, and legislators are more often responsive to lobbyists in the capitol than their own constituents. Replacing apathy with activism presents an enormous opportunity for you to make an impact at your statehouse.
- **State legislators are influenced by money and lobbying.** Because state legislators don't receive much media attention compared to national politicians, they also aren't the benefactors of grassroots fundraising attention. This opens up the floodgates for lobbyists and PACs to fund campaigns, even among Democrats. Again, this presents an opportunity: even a slight increase in grassroots fundraising for progressive state legislators could make a difference for them.
- **State legislatures are seen as a pipeline for higher office.** Many national politicians start their careers in state legislatures. Twenty-two

former U.S. Presidents (including President Obama!), 22 former Vice Presidents, 44 current sitting Senators, and 220 current Congressional representatives served in state legislatures before moving to national office. If your state has term limits for state offices, your legislators may be more likely to seek higher office and be even more receptive to constituent pressure as a way of protecting their future electoral prospects.

What do state legislatures have in common?

Even though each state legislature is unique, many of them share a few basic characteristics:

- **Most legislatures are bicameral.** This just means they have two chambers. (The exception to this rule is Nebraska, which only has a single legislative chamber.) The states that are bicameral usually have a “lower” house which has more members that represent smaller geographical areas (like the federal House of Representatives) and an “upper” house which has fewer members that represent larger geographical areas (like the federal Senate). The “lower” house is often called the House or Assembly, and the “upper” house is called the state Senate.
- **Legislative sessions start at the beginning of the year.** Most legislatures start in January or February, but vary in length. This is important because lawmakers use the months preceding their legislative session to collect ideas for bills. If you have an idea for legislation that you would like introduced, you need to hit the ground running after the election.
- **Bills are supported (and often written by) outside groups** who work with legislators to help get the bill passed.
- **Many bills are moving simultaneously** through a given state legislature. There are usually hundreds or even thousands of bills introduced in a single legislative session.
- **Bills go through three “readings”** to pass through a chamber. The first reading is when a bill is first introduced into the chamber. The bill is then usually assigned to policy committee(s) which will assess the bill. After the bill is reported out of policy committee to the floor, it

undergoes the second reading, which is often when amendments to the committee-reported bill are allowed. The third reading is when the bill is voted on by the legislators for final passage.

- **Bills must pass** both chambers of a legislature and be signed by the Governor in order to become law. In some states, if the Governor does not proactively veto a bill, it still becomes law without their signature.
- **The committee process is extremely important.** Though committee structures vary by state, as a general principle bills must pass through specialized committees of jurisdiction before they go to the floor of a chamber, similar to Congress. This is often where substantive amendments are made (though amendments can often also be made on the floor). Each committee has a chairperson who exerts a great deal of control over what happens in the committee by deciding things like which bills get heard, which ones never get brought up, and the schedule it all happens on. Constituent involvement in the committee process through direct engagement with committee members, public testimony, or written statements can be enormously impactful.
- **The legislative leadership is usually very powerful.** Similar to how Mitch McConnell and Paul Ryan exert an enormous amount of power over what bills see the light of day in Congress, the leaders of each state legislative chamber also have a great deal of power. They often determine committee assignments for legislators, and decide to which committee proposed bills should be assigned for consideration. They can even sometimes unilaterally hold a bill and prevent it from moving forward. They also have power over things that constituents never see but that could play a role in policymaking, like individual office budgets, committee staff resources, staff salaries, and who gets which actual physical office spaces.

That being said, leadership may be more or less powerful in a given state depending on the political factors in that state. For example, a battleground state may have less entrenched leadership since power may oscillate back and forth between parties. Similarly, states with term limits that exhibit more turnover will place less emphasis on leadership than states with unlimited terms. On the other hand, a single-party ruled state will likely have more entrenched leadership.

What makes state legislatures different from each other?

Despite the similarities named above, legislatures do differ in some key ways that will affect your advocacy strategy:

- **Each state legislature meets for different lengths of time**, ranging from 30 days every other year to year-round. Believe it or not, only *nine* states have full-time legislatures — California, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Alaska, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The rest of the states meet part-time with some states like Montana, Nevada, Texas, North Dakota only meeting in odd-numbered years.
- **The legislative process is different for each state**. Bills can usually originate in either chamber, and then cross over to the other house. However, in some states, bills that increase or decrease revenue must start in the lower house and then move to the upper house. Some legislatures have internal deadlines within their session for bills to pass out of committee or cross over to the second house. Others have no internal deadlines and the process is a free-for-all. Some have rules about how long bills must take to move through a process, while others don't.
- **Each state has different numbers of representatives**. A single legislative chamber could have as few as 20 members, as many as 400, or anywhere in between.
- **Each state varies in the amount of resources and staff that legislators have**. Legislators in California have tons of resources and each legislator has multiple staff and aides, while legislators from New Hampshire may be lucky to even have one paid staff person and may be entirely staffed by volunteers. Similarly, legislators in some states may have offices in their home districts as well as at the state capital, while in other states, they may only have capital offices.
- **Your state may have other unique features**. Look for other things that may make your state particularly unique. Does your state have a lame duck session? Does your state have a rule that every bill introduced must have a hearing? Does your state have rules for bills that require

appropriation of money? How important is the budget process in your state? Each state has its own idiosyncrasies so learn yours.

How can you learn about your own state's legislature?

You'll need to learn about how your own state's legislature works and who represents you.

Who represents me?

1. Find your state legislators, their official websites, and their office contact info.
2. Sign up on your legislators' websites and social media platforms to receive regular updates, invites to local events, and propaganda to understand what they're saying. Every legislator has an e-newsletter.
3. Find out where your legislators stand on the issues of the day in your community. Review their voting history and their biggest campaign contributors.
4. Set up a Google News Alert — for example for “Rep. Bob Smith” — to receive an email whenever your legislators are in the news.
5. Research on Google News what local reporters have written about your legislators. Find and follow those reporters on Twitter, and build relationships. Before you attend or plan an event, reach out and explain why your group is protesting, and provide them with 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.

How does my legislature work?

Here are some basic questions to ask yourself when learning about your state's [legislative process](#).

- [What dates is my state legislature in session?](#)

- [Does my state legislature have specific deadlines to meet as legislation moves through the process?](#)
- [How many members are in each chamber of my legislature and what is the party composition of those chambers?](#)
- [Who is my Governor?](#)
- Who is part of the state legislative leadership?

State Legislative Session Dates

State	Start Date	End Date
Alabama	03/25/2019	05/23/2019
Alaska	01/15/2019	05/16/2020
Arizona	01/14/2019	05/11/2019
Arkansas	01/14/2019	05/02/2019
California	12/03/2018	09/13/2019
Colorado	01/09/2019	05/11/2019
Connecticut	01/09/2019	06/08/2019
Delaware	01/08/2019	06/30/2020
Florida	03/05/2019	05/03/2019
Georgia	01/14/2019	03/20/2020
Hawaii	01/16/2019	05/03/2020
Idaho	01/07/2019	03/30/2019
Illinois	01/09/2019	01/06/2021
Indiana	01/14/2019	04/21/2019
Iowa	01/14/2019	04/21/2020
Kansas	01/14/2019	06/26/2019
Kentucky	01/08/2019	03/30/2019
Louisiana	04/14/2019	06/06/2019
Maine	12/05/2018	04/15/2020
Maryland	01/09/2019	04/10/2019
Massachusetts	01/02/2019	01/07/2021
Michigan	01/09/2019	12/31/2020
Minnesota	01/08/2019	05/21/2020

Mississippi	01/08/2019	03/30/2019
Missouri	01/09/2019	05/31/2019
Montana	01/07/2019	04/20/2019
Nebraska	01/09/2019	04/15/2020
Nevada	02/04/2019	06/04/2019
New Hampshire	01/02/2019	06/30/2019
New Jersey	01/09/2018	01/07/2020
New Mexico	01/15/2019	03/16/2019
New York	01/09/2019	01/06/2021
North Carolina	01/16/2019	06/30/2020
North Dakota	01/03/2019	04/26/2019
Ohio	01/07/2019	12/31/2020
Oklahoma	02/05/2019	05/25/2020
Oregon	02/05/2019	06/01/2019
Pennsylvania	01/01/2019	11/30/2020
Rhode Island	01/01/2019	06/30/2019
South Carolina	01/08/2019	06/08/2020
South Dakota	01/08/2019	03/29/2019
Tennessee	01/08/2019	05/08/2020
Texas	01/08/2019	05/27/2019
Utah	01/28/2019	03/14/2019
Vermont	01/09/2019	05/12/2020
Virginia	01/09/2019	03/09/2019
Washington	01/14/2019	04/22/2020
West Virginia	01/09/2019	03/09/2019
Wisconsin	01/07/2019	01/04/2021
Wyoming	01/08/2019	03/09/2019

To learn more about the ins and outs of your particular state, it can be helpful to connect with experts (partners, legislators, legislative staff) and pick their brains to learn what goes on behind the scenes of the legislative process.

Chapter 3. Organizing your state to win

Organize locally

The original Indivisible Guide clearly outlined the importance of [organizing locally in groups to exert maximize pressure on your elected officials](#). That still holds true today!

We have a full National Organizing team spread out across the country to support you in your work. So when you are ready to begin exercising your constituent power at your statehouse, the first thing you should do is **work with your National organizer!** There is a full-time organizer on Indivisible National's staff dedicated to providing you resources and support in your activism. Your regional organizer can connect you with other Indivisible groups, provide materials to help you strengthen and grow your group, share calls to action from National, and more. [Find out who your organizer](#) is here and take advantage of what they have to offer you and your group!

There are local Indivisible groups in every congressional district across the country, so chances are there is an Indivisible group near you: [Find it here using our group map](#). If you are already part of an Indivisible group, the next step is to grow and strengthen your group. Organizing takes thoughtful planning and consistent evaluation to make sure your group is as strong as possible. Make it a top priority for your Indivisible group to recruit new members so that you can build power to push for change in your state. Check out our resources to learn how to create, grow, and strengthen your group:

- [Organize locally](#)
- [How to Make New Friends!](#)
- [Building a Great Leadership Team](#)

Collaborate with other Indivisible groups in your state

The collective energy of Indivisibles across a state can be powerful.

Coordinating with other groups in your state is a key type of coalition building — it reduces redundancy, expands your reach, and builds your power. Indivisibles in some states have already begun to work together in various ways, such as [Indivisible Illinois'](#) statewide call to [Indivisible CA: StateStrong's](#) statewide state legislative working group. Whatever form it takes, cementing some sort of communication or coordination structure for

state legislative efforts will elevate your advocacy, allow for Indivisible cohesion, and create a stronger coalition of groups that can mobilize around a legislative campaign. Work with your regional organizer to get connected with other Indivisible groups and find a method that works for the groups in your state.

For some ideas on statewide Indivisible collaboration see Appendix 1: Collaborate with other Indivisible Groups in your state.

Connect with partner organizations

At all levels of advocacy (federal, state, and local), it is critical that you work in collaboration with value-aligned partner organizations to be a respectful part of the movement and maximize your collective power.

1. **Your Indivisible group may be new to the advocacy space.** Policy experts, state advocates, and other grassroots organizations have been working toward social justice in their communities for decades before the Indivisible movement even began. We must all work intentionally and respectfully with those that have been championing social justice fights before us.
2. **Organizing and advocating in a silo is inefficient.** Indivisibles bring enthusiasm and people power to any advocacy arena, and that is your biggest strength. So find the people already working on your issues and coordinate with them, otherwise you might be getting in each other's way. Combining your time and resources with organizations that have different strengths means that you and your partners will be most efficient and effective and more likely to win!

How to be a good partner

When working with partners that represent marginalized communities, it is always important to be thoughtful, respectful, and intentional. Check out [Indivisible Highland Park's blog](#) about how they worked with local immigrant rights groups on a successful effort to make LA a sanctuary city. Below are some tips for being a good partner.

1. **Cultivate transformational relationships.** A transactional relationship is a give-and-take relationship grounded in self-interest,

whereas a transformational relationship focuses on building longevity and trust. Instead of talking to partners only when you want to ask for help (transactional), build an ongoing relationship and determine how both of your groups can contribute to the movement (transformational).

- 2. Build strong allyship.** Start by educating yourself and your group on the background of organizations representing impacted communities and the history of their movement. But don't stop there. Next, commit to dismantling the abusive systems and institutionalized practices that have created inequity. That means donating to impacted communities with time, money, and resources. That means learning what microaggressions are and how to avoid them, and educating your own white friends about the harms of white supremacy and institutional racism.
- 3. Don't parachute in.** Parachuting is rushing into the advocacy sphere out of nowhere and taking an authoritative position over marginalized communities that are most impacted. For example, you may feel passionately about protecting immigrants in your community, but unless you're talking to the groups that regularly work on immigrant rights and serve immigrant populations, you won't know what they consider most important. At best you might be ineffective; at worst you might actively undermine their priorities. Avoid parachuting by being a consistently visible accomplice and by deferring to the leadership of impacted communities.
- 4. Take an intersectional approach.** Intersectionality refers to individuals experiencing multiple forms of discrimination or privilege that compound each other. It's the idea that the experience of being a woman or of being black is different from the experience of being a black woman. When you are working with partners, be sure to intentionally consider how multiple identities can inform a struggle.

Read our other resources to learn more about how to build local partnerships and how to ensure that those partnerships are inclusive.

- [How to form local partnerships](#)
- [How to build inclusive partnerships](#)

Chapter 4. Defining a Strategy in Your State

In the current federal political climate, it feels like every value we care about is under attack — but we have to be intentional in deciding how to fight back in the states. In any given state legislative session, hundreds or thousands of bills may be moving at the same time. A big challenge for new state advocates can be simply choosing what legislation to work on when it's impossible to work on everything.

You'll need to prioritize in order to maximize your impact. It is critical to prioritize what legislation you decide to advocate for in order to meaningfully engage and have an impact. If you try to work on too many things at once, you'll spread your group too thin to be effective. Start by creating consensus around the issues your state's Indivisible groups care about; then, identify what bills have been introduced around those issues and where you can have most impact. Connecting with aligned issue-based groups can also provide insight into where you can be most helpful.

For some ideas about how to prioritize what types of state legislation you might advocate for, see Appendix 2: Prioritizing state issues to work on.

Build a strategic campaign plan

After you decide what you'll work on, it's useful to map out a campaign plan. In your planning, you should think about the different steps of the legislative process that the bill will need to pass through, consider who the key decision makers are in each step, and plan appropriate advocacy tactics to pressure those decision makers to vote in your favor. You'll want to:

1. Define your goal.

It's important to be explicit about your goal. Is your goal to get a bill passed? Is your goal to stop a bill from being passed? Is your goal to move the bill and the conversation around a specific issue forward in a multi-year effort?

Though specific goals will vary by state, district, and municipality, there's a convenient way to think about each goal you set to make sure you're planning for success. SMART is an easy acronym to think about your goals:

- ***Specific:*** straightforward and simple.
- ***Measurable:*** include a metric to determine success that can be either qualitative or quantitative.
- ***Attainable:*** goals can be lofty, but should remain achievable in that you have the power to make it happen.
- ***Realistic:*** similar to achievable, make sure your goal is something you can feasibly work toward
- ***Time-bound:*** include a specific frame of time that the goal is accomplished within.

You can have more than one goal at a time, but make sure you're intentional in setting each goal, and that you are setting your group up for success by not having too many goals at once.

2. Map out your bill's trajectory.

The first step in your advocacy plan is to figure out the path of your bill.

You should know some basic details if you've learned generally how your state's legislative process works. **A great first step is to meet with the author of the bill or other organizational cosponsors.** Let them know that you'd like to help mobilize grassroots support for their bill and they will be very happy to talk to you. It's critical to understand the history of the issue you're working on too — if a bill has stalled for the past 4 sessions, you need to understand why. Talking to bill authors and organizational stakeholders can help you understand the landscape and the history. These relationships will also help you stay up-to-date on the bill throughout the legislative process. In your planning, identify key votes (e.g. committee and floor votes) and the strategic pressure timepoints for action (e.g. in the week or two leading up to a vote).

3. Determine who holds power to make the change you want to see.

Power mapping is an organizing tool used by advocates to identify the most strategic targets that you need to influence in order to accomplish your goal. For each step in your bill's trajectory, you should figure out who has the power to move the bill forward so that you can target your advocacy tactics effectively. Here are some questions to consider while power mapping:

- **To understand who the powerful decision makers are:**
 - Where is the bill in the legislative process?
 - What chamber is it being considered in?
 - Who is the leader of that chamber?
 - What committee is it in?
 - Who is the chair of the committee?
 - Who are the members of the committee?

- **To understand who the other stakeholders might be:**
 - Who is the author of the bill? (likely your ally)
 - Who is working against the change we seek? (likely your opponent)
 - Who is this taking power away from? (likely your opponent)
 - Who has hired lobbyists? (likely to have influence on the fight)
 - Who are the organizational cosponsors? (likely your allies)
 - Have there been previous bills, and who was involved then? (likely to have knowledge that could be useful to you)
 - What communities are impacted? (likely to be stakeholders)

Once you understand who the players are, you should determine where they fall on your spectrum of allies. Are they already on your side, are they adamantly opposed, or are they leaning in one direction? We need not convince our most committed opponents, so much as merely move them towards neutral. Similarly, turning a neutral target into even a weak ally can shift the broader needle on the fight. This type of power mapping exercise allows you to target your strategy to be most impactful.

	Active Support	Passive Support	Neutral	Passive Opposition	Active Opposition
More Power ⇕ Less Power					

4. Develop your strategy.

Your strategy is how you turn the resources you have into the power you need to get what you want. In the case of state advocacy, your strategy will define how you organize your resources to push those who hold the power to accomplish your goal of passing or stopping legislation.

In developing your strategy, you should finalize your target(s) based on your power mapping exercise, and determine what is most likely to move them. Generally, your strategy will likely involve moving your representatives through the use of constituent pressure. You should also identify key opponents you may be able to neutralize and key people on the sideline you may be able to get on to your side. Finally, you should explicitly note with whom you will build partnerships.

5. Actually build a campaign plan.

There are a variety of powerful tactics that you can use to pressure your state lawmakers. Some of these tactics are very similar to those we use for federal advocacy, but there are some tactics that are unique to state legislative work. Check out Chapter 5 for more details.

It can be enormously helpful to actually write out a campaign plan, outlining your strategy in tactics and identifying resources you will need and the timeline for execution. See Appendix 3: Sample campaign plan.

Track state bills through the legislative process

Once you're in the throes of a state advocacy fight, you'll need to be able to track your bill through the legislative process so that you know what committees it's going to, and when there will be hearings.

- **Contact the bill author's office.** The person who will know the most about the progress of a bill is the legislator who wrote it. It's useful to have a contact point in the author's office that you can check in with whenever you have a question. When you call, ask to speak to the staffer who is working on your bill of interest. Let them know that you are interested in supporting their bill and would like to check in with them regularly about its status. If you are planning to actively oppose a

bill, you may not want to tell them that you're planning to oppose the bill — just ask more general questions.

- **Work with partner organizations.** We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to work with partners.
- **Get to know your state legislature's website.** Just like no state legislatures are created equal, neither are two [state legislature websites](#) similar. Most legislatures' website have a feature to search for bills by number. Usually, this is where you will be able to find the most up-to-date bill text and information on status. In [some states](#), you can even sign up for free email alerts for specific bills to stay up to speed on any activity. Some states may even have video streaming of committee meetings or floor deliberations. So even if you can't travel to the capitol on a given day, you can still stay informed on what's happening with the legislation you're interested in.
- **Use a free online legislative tracker.** Some state legislature websites are a complete nightmare to navigate. There are a few free online tools that allow you to follow and track state legislation that you may want to explore:
 - [LegiScan](#)
 - [Fast Democracy](#)
 - [Open States](#) (doesn't allow you to subscribe and track, but can be more user-friendly than some state legislature websites)

Chapter 5. Tactics for state legislative advocacy

Once you have an overarching strategy to guide your actions, you'll need to decide what specific tactics to use at each step. The difference between strategy and tactics is that a strategy outlines *how* you will accomplish your goal, but tactics are the specific actions you will take. You can think of your strategy as the road that leads to your destination, and the tactics you use as the car that you drive on that road — the former guides your progress, and the latter is what actually moves you forward. It's important to consider what tactics you will use that *fit with your strategy*. For example, if you want to pass

a bill through a committee, you'll want to use effective tactics that will target the members of that committee — not other legislators who do not have power in that committee. Selecting tactics that align with your strategy is key to achieving your goals.

The more effort you put into your advocacy tactic, the better. When you show up at an office in person with a group, it signals that there is real passion for an issue among constituents. On the flip side, advocacy tactics that don't take much effort, don't come from the target legislator's constituents, and don't generate attention aren't impactful. You should feel free to be creative and tailor your tactics to your district and group. It's important to use a variety of different tactics so that the legislators and the local media keep paying attention.

The original Indivisible Guide laid out some core [tactics](#) for influencing your members of Congress (e.g. town halls, local public events, district office visits, coordinated calls). **All of these tried and true tactics apply to your state legislators as well.** However, as a state legislative advocate, you also have a few other items in your toolbox.

Impacting the committee process

In state legislatures, the committee process is extremely important and a time when you can be enormously impactful. If your member is on specific committees of interest to you (or, even more importantly, if your member is the chair of a committee), you can wield enormous influence over the fate of the bills heard in those committees by pressuring your member. Because you have to convince fewer members at the committee level in order to change the outcome of a vote, your activism can go a long way. You can also participate in any committee's process as a member of the public by:

- **Submitting written letters of support/opposition to a committee** (See Appendix 4)
 - A coordinated letter about a bill from a coalition of Indivisible groups across the state to a committee can be powerful. Written testimonies often appear in legislative analyses that are written by committees.
- **Giving public testimony at a legislative hearing** (See Appendix 5)

- Public testimony at a hearing allows you the opportunity to be heard directly by the decision makers who will be voting on a piece of legislation.

Lobbying your legislators

Lobbying is organizing with the intention of influencing a lawmaker's decision through direct interaction. You can lobby in your home district office (if your state has local district offices) or at the capitol.

>> A note about targeting state legislators who don't represent you: DON'T DO IT.

There are NO exceptions to this rule. Even if that legislator is in leadership, even if they're on a relevant committee, and even if they're making a decision that affects your whole state — state legislators simply do not care about calls and pressure from non-constituents, and calling them anyway will be counterproductive. We know it's tempting, but it's important not to do this. [Read more here](#) about why you should never call MoCs who aren't yours.

- **District office visits** (See Appendix 6)
 - A bread and butter Indivisible tactic that allows you to meet with your legislator's staff. Not all states have district offices for state legislators, but if yours does, take advantage of this to stage an impromptu town hall meeting by showing up with a small group.
- **Organizing a legislative lobby day at the state capitol** (See Appendix 7)
 - A lobby day is a powerful tactic that many organizations utilize to influence the state legislative process. For a lobby day, you gather a group of people to take a trip to the capitol and hold in-person meetings with legislators and/or their staff. This tactic is powerful because you are showing commitment to your cause and meeting lawmakers in person in their place of work.
- **[Town halls](#)**
 - Another bread and butter Indivisible tactic. The February 2017 recess town halls were the first time Indivisibles were noticed.

Who will ever forget [Tom Cotton](#) getting confronted by angry constituents?

- **Local public events**

- Like town halls, these are opportunities to get face time with your legislators and make sure they're hearing about your concerns, while simultaneously changing the narrative from "Legislator Shows Up at Event" to "Legislator Confronted By Constituents About [Issue] at Event".

- **Coordinated calls** (See Appendix 8)

- Mass calls to offices doesn't take as much time as in-person action, but it can have a huge impact at the state level, where staffers are not used to getting a large volume of calls.

Getting Local Media Coverage: Why It's Essential and How to Get It

State legislators care enormously about maintaining a good image in their hometown media. Every legislator wants to generate positive local press coverage that makes them appear hardworking and responsive to their constituents. They want to appear in-touch, well-liked and competent. They want to get local media coverage of their work on certain policy issues whenever possible — and talk about other issues as little as they can. They want to avoid negative attention that suggests they aren't listening to their constituents and are facing backlash, which will make it harder for them to get re-elected. Splashy cable TV shows are nice, but local media is where a state legislator's career lives and dies, and where their legacy matters most. Generating local media coverage forces your legislator and their staff to spend time reckoning with your issues and your stories.

When you can get media coverage of your actions, it increases the impact by orders of magnitude. By reaching out to statehouse reporters at different points in your campaign, and getting your position inserted into their coverage, you can crank up the pressure you're putting on your lawmakers.

>> A note about statehouse reporters

Every state government has a small community of reporters who cover

it. These are different than reporters that cover federal issues; it may even be easier to get the attention of state/local reporters. But statehouse reporters are some of the most overworked and under-resourced reporters in journalism. They normally work for print publications and their jobs are always on the chopping block when budget cuts come. They often cover all of the branches of state governments with no help, and normally only have capacity to cover the biggest stories. This means you need to make their job as easy as possible if you want to get coverage.

Remember that reporters want to hear from you. Working with media can seem like a black box if you haven't done it before. Remember: It's somebody's job to tell the story of the bill you are working on or the policy you're trying to change. It's their job to keep track of developments, talk to experts and activists, and write interesting stories that can help illustrate why it matters. You're helping them do their job.

Here are some tips for getting local media for your actions:

- **Build a media list.** When you get started on your campaign, Google around and read the recent news stories about your state government or your issue. You'll find a lot of the same reporters' names come up over and over again. Start gathering a list of those names, and look for their email addresses as you go. That's your new "media list"!
- **Record everything.** We've said it before and we'll say it again: if it wasn't recorded, it didn't happen. Take photos of your group visiting legislators' offices and post them on social media. Take lots of photos and videos of big events you have, and send them to the media after the event if they aren't able to make it.
- **Make the reporter's job as easy as possible.** Because statehouse reporters are so under-resourced, you need to make it easy AND interesting for them to report on your story. Package everything for them — basically write their story for them. Give them quotes, photos, videos, statements, contact information of other people to call, and pre-packaged stories of how the issue affects real constituents (whom they can then interview) — then boil that down to the snappiest, shortest pitch you can.

- **Assign a press point person from your group.** If possible, assign one or two people to be in charge of your communication with the media. This ensures that reporters know who to go to when they need something.
- You can learn more about tips and tricks for getting media coverage [here](#).

You also have some specific media tactics that you can use to bring awareness to your state legislative campaign:

- **Letters to the editor**
 - Letters to the editor in your local newspaper that mention your legislator by name are a great way to get their attention. State legislators and their staff regularly review press clips that mention them, including letters to the editor — meaning that your advocacy will get noticed and discussed in the office.
- **Op-Eds**
 - The op-ed section of a local newspaper is some of the most valuable real estate in media. State legislators regularly use local op-ed pages to craft their own narrative, shape public opinion, and showcase their leadership. By writing your own op-eds in local papers, you can be a part of telling that story, too. Whether you support or oppose your state legislator, getting into the op-ed space is a great way to hold them accountable.

>> Run for local office yourself!

Around the country, we've seen Indivisible leaders and members use their new-found organizing skills to run for office. Sometimes, when your representative — no matter their political party — won't listen to you, the best thing to do is run for office yourself! Over the last two years, we've been inspired to see local Indivisibles raising their hands to run for office at every level of government: county boards, city councils, state house and senate, and even the U.S. Congress.

Conclusion

“States are the laboratories of democracy.” — U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis

We wrote this guide to complement the incredible advocacy work already being done by Indivisibles across the country. Since the 2016 election, Indivisibles have showed up time and time again to demand change from Congress — and you have already begun to take those same concepts of participatory democracy to your elected officials at all levels.

Our goal is to provide a practical understanding of how state legislatures work, and of how you can use your constituent power to both resist harmful federal policies and pave the way for progress at the state level.

This is not a panacea, and it is not intended to stand alone. We strongly urge you to marry the state-level strategy in this guide with the tried and true strategy of our federal Guide and a broader commitment to creating a more just society, building local power, and addressing systemic injustice and racism.

Appendix 1: Collaborate with other Indivisible groups in your state

The collective energy of Indivisibles across a state can be powerful.

Coordinating with other groups in your state is just another type of coalition building and achieves the purposes of reducing redundancy, expanding reach, and building power. Indivisibles in some states have already begun to work together in various ways from [Indivisible Illinois](#)’ statewide call to [Indivisible CA: StateStrong](#)’s statewide state legislative working group. Whatever form it takes, cementing some sort of communication or coordination structure for state legislative efforts will elevate your advocacy, allow for Indivisible cohesion, and create a stronger coalition of groups that can mobilize around a legislative campaign. By working together, you’ll be able to mobilize the relevant groups at the relevant time to have the most impact. Find a way that works for the groups in your state.

Below are a few different ideas of **ways you can implement statewide collaboration** based on what Indivisibles in other states have tried.

Connect with your Indivisible Organizer.

Did you know that every state has an Indivisible National Organizer? One of the ways they support the work happening across the country is by connecting groups and helping develop further collaboration. If you're not already in touch with your Organizer, you can reach out [here](#). They can share with you if there's already coordination happening with groups across the state -- or if there's not, they can help you get it set up!

Schedule statewide Indivisible calls.

Pick a consistent time to jump on a video or conference call with other Indivisible leaders in your state. Based on your state's needs and activities, this could be every week, biweekly, or every month. This can be a good forum to exchange ideas and update each other on what issues everyone is working on. Make sure you have a facilitator and agenda for each call. Consider rotating facilitators to reduce burnout. Reach out to your statewide Organizer if you need help setting up a call and agenda!

Set up an internal statewide Indivisible email list.

Most Indivisible groups have public newsletter mailing lists. But being able to communicate internally with all of the amazing group leaders in your state quickly can be helpful if a piece of legislation suddenly comes up for a vote or a rapid mobilization is necessary. For example, many Indivisibles have used google groups to internally communicate with each other en masse.

Choose an online platform for continued conversation.

Many Indivisibles have found online chatting platforms to be an efficient way to streamline communication and prevent email overload. Some Indivisibles use statewide private facebook groups for conversations. Another popular option is Slack, an online communication tool that allows for conversation to be streamed into different channels based on the topic. Slack can be helpful for states with larger networks of members.

Set up a statewide state legislative working group.

Some states like California, New Jersey, and Minnesota have gone a step further and formed statewide working groups that focus exclusively on state legislative work. These working groups usually have leaders from several different groups who have taken on the specialized task of following the state legislative process and informing the other group leaders in the state about legislation and calls to action. Set up a specific state legislative communication structure for your work group. Use an email list, slack channel, facebook group, and conference call with representatives from as many districts as possible across your state.

Map each Indivisible group to state legislative district.

It is really helpful to know which state legislative districts are represented by each group. That way, when a crucial vote is upcoming and you find out that there is a critical legislator from a certain district whose vote is needed, constituents in his district can drive calls or actions to the target legislator. So when you're starting to talk to other group leaders, keep track of their state legislative districts.

Appendix 2: Prioritizing state issues to work on

In the current federal political climate, it feels like every value we care about is under attack. In any given state legislative session, hundreds or thousands of bills may be moving at the same time. A big challenge for new state advocates can be simply choosing what legislation to work on when it's impossible to work on everything.

Prioritize in order to maximize impact. It is absolutely critical to prioritize what legislation you decide to advocate for in order actually engage meaningfully and have an impact. If you try to work on too many things at once, you'll spread yourself too thin and be ineffective.

Below are some questions to ask yourself to help you prioritize what types of state legislation you might advocate for:

- **What issues do my Indivisible group members and Indivisible groups across the state care the most about?** It is important to work

on something that you and your group are passionate about. People are motivated to do advocacy because they care deeply about issues. Don't try too hard to push people to care about something that doesn't resonate with them. You will also have more power if you can collectively decide to work on the same issue with other Indivisible groups across your state. Once you start [collaborating with other Indivisibles](#), work with your National organizer to try to build consensus across your state.

- **Does this bill relate to national priorities or other federal issues?** In the face of all-out federal assault on our values, states are one line of defense. If the federal government is undermining something you care about (e.g. immigration, environment, racial justice, reproductive rights), consider advocating to restore protections in your home state. Without a political climate that allows us to actually implement progressive policies at the federal level, we can advocate for those same federal priorities at the state level in the meantime.
- **Does this bill protect or expand the rights of marginalized populations?** One of the core and founding principles of Indivisible is the idea of treating an attack on one as an attack on all. The Trump administration has made it a priority to attack our most vulnerable and marginalized populations. We can push back and make our states a safe haven for all residents.
- **Does this bill help change the rules and structures of the democratic system to make it work better?** Progressives have struggled to make lasting change because the cards are stacked against us. Republicans have changed the rules of democracy to entrench their power. Therefore, by focusing on issues that fundamentally repair the broken structures of democracy (e.g. voting rights, campaign finance reform, redistricting), we can make more progressive change possible for the future.
- **Is this an issue area that is entirely controlled by the states or an issue over which states have a great deal of power?** There are certain progressive issue areas that are actually entirely or mostly controlled at the state level, making this extra ripe for state advocacy. These are issues like voting rights, redistricting, criminal justice reform, and policing.

- **Is this fight winnable?** It's a bitter pill to swallow, but it is a waste of time to work on legislation that has a 0% chance of being passed. You'll know more about whether fights are winnable based on the make-up of your legislature and the issue area. For example, if you live in a very red state and there is a Medicare-for-all bill, it is probably not worth your energy to work on it. In these instances, it's more important to focus on smaller, winnable steps toward a policy goal or to first focus on changing the composition of your legislature via electoral work.
- **Would constituent power add value and make a difference?** Similarly, it is also a poor use of resources to work on legislation that has a 100% chance of being passed. It is important to consider whether your contribution to an advocacy fight would actually add value to the fight. This means that it may be better to choose campaigns that don't have a lot of grassroots support already. For example, if a campaign already has 20 grassroots organizations working on it, your help might not be needed. It would be more effective to join a fight that needs your help and where your constituent power could swing the needle from a loss to a win.

Appendix 3: Example strategic campaign plan

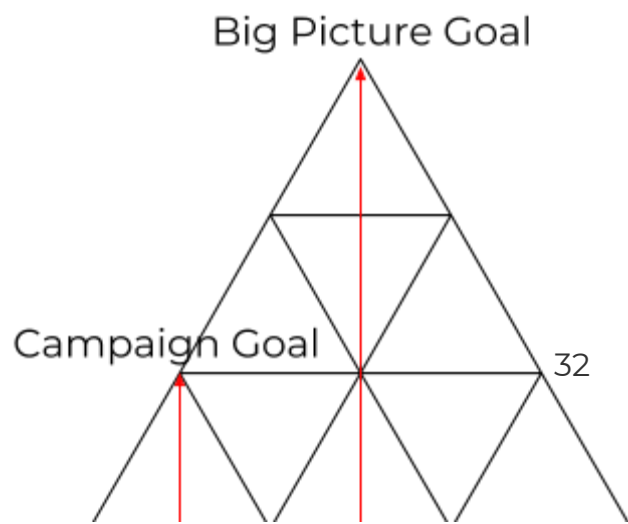
Part 1: Team

- Groups: List Indivisible groups you work with
- Partner Organizations: List partners you work in coalition with
- Indivisible National Organizer: List your Indivisible national organizer

Part 2: Goals

Big Picture Goal:

What are you trying to accomplish in your state? What is the specific big picture policy that you're aiming for? Why? Is part of your goal to improve collaboration across Indivisible groups in your state? Is part of your goal to



show up as good partners for impacted communities?

Campaign goal:

What is the specific bill, initiative, effort you are undertaking that gets you closer to the big picture goal?

Policy Background

What is the background of the policy or legislation that you are trying to get passed. Give a brief overview.

Part 3: Strategy

Legislative Targets

Map out your bill's trajectory. What committees will it be heading to? Who are the key decision makers on those committees? Are there other key decision makers in leadership who may need to be influenced?

Legislative Timeline

When will the bill be moving? Are there key timepoints for action in the legislative calendar that you can identify?

Example timeline from California:

- Mid April: Bill heard in Assembly Public Safety Committee
 - April 27th: Deadline for bill to pass policy committee
- Mid May: Bill heard in Assembly Appropriations
 - May 25th: Deadline for bill to pass Appropriations
- Last week of May: Bill heard on Assembly floor
 - May 31st: Deadline for bill to pass floor of Assembly
- Early/Mid June: Bill heard in Senate Public Safety
 - June 29th: Deadline for bill to pass policy committee
- July: Recess
- Early August: Bill heard in Senate Appropriations
 - August 17th: Deadline for bill to pass Appropriations
- Last two weeks of August: Bill heard on Senate floor
 - August 31st: Deadline to pass and send to Governor

- September: Bill sent to Governor
 - September 30th: Deadline for Governor signature

Part 4: Metrics & Tactics

Name and describe the tactics that you'll be using throughout your program. Explain their effectiveness and why they make sense. Use the lists of tactics below to think about different options, and choose the metrics that go with them! Also think about HOW you'll use each tactic and WHEN they make the most sense.

Example Tactics	Example Metrics
Written testimony	XX Indivisible groups across the state submit a written testimony in advance of a committee vote
Oral testimony	XX Indivisible members appear for oral testimony in XX% of committee hearings for the bill
Office visits	XX% of target legislators receive office visits from their local Indivisible groups
Phone calls	XX phone calls from constituents to target legislators in advance of critical votes
Lobby day	XX people attend a lobby day at the capitol
Op-eds	XX op-eds placed in local papers
Letters to the editor	XX letters to the editor placed in local papers
Social media	Our campaign hashtag is mentioned XX times

Part 5: Timeline

- DATE or DATE RANGE
 - Strategy (e.g. Build coalition to work on this legislation/issue)
 - Tactics: (e.g. Outreach to Indivisible groups and partner organizations)
- DATE or DATE RANGE
 - Strategy (e.g. Build media awareness of legislation or issue)
 - Tactics: (e.g. Place op-ed in statewide paper)

- DATE or DATE RANGE
 - Strategy (e.g. Pressure legislators on committee to vote yes on the bill)
 - Tactics: (e.g. Submit written testimony, outreach to indivisible members of committee members to drive local phone calls, appear for oral testimony at committee hearing)
- DATE or DATE RANGE
 - Strategy:
 - Tactics:

Part 5: Resources

What resources do you need to implement your campaign plan and who might be able to provide them to you (i.e. what your coalition has: time, money, skills, materials, relationships, etc?)

<i>Resources Needed:</i>	<i>Who can help:</i>
(E.g op-ed writers)	
(E.g. sample call scripts)	
(E.g. transportation to a lobby day)	
(E.g. graphics for office visits & twitter)	

Appendix 4: Submitting written letters of support/opposition to a policy committee

In state legislatures, **the committee process is extremely important**. Once a bill is introduced, it is referred to a policy committee, which debates its content and may propose amendments. This is where interest groups on both sides of the aisle weigh in and lobby legislators hard because there are fewer people to convince of your position. As a result, bills can easily fail in committee and never see the light of day. So if there is a bill that you care about, engaging in the **committee process is both absolutely critical and enormously impactful** — a little effort can go a long way.

Sending a written letter of your Indivisible group’s position directly to a state legislative policy committee is a tried and true method of making your voice

heard at the committee level. Committees keep a list of the written testimonies they receive from various interest groups. Sometimes, portions of your testimony may even be included in formal bill analysis documents that are provided to legislators when they are voting!

Tips for sending a letter to a committee:

1. **Find a template letter.** Oftentimes, supporting organizations that are helping to shepherd legislation through the process will draft template support letters for other aligned organizations to use. These are a great starting point and will reduce your workload! If you've built strategic partnerships like we recommend, you should reach out to your coalition partners to see if there are materials already written for you to use.
2. **Writing a letter from scratch / customizing your letter.** Sometimes, you may not have a template to work from. In this case you'll need to draft a testimony that outlines why your group is supporting or opposing a bill.
 - Do some **research** about the issue that the bill tackles and the provisions of the bill that you support. Don't hesitate to google the bill. Not all bills get a ton of press coverage but some do. Reading op-eds or news articles about the bills are another great way to find out info. Do not lift any information verbatim unless you are sure the text is not copyright protected.
 - Try to **be specific** about how your specific community is impacted and personalize your letter to speak about your own constituency.
 - **Use our template** below to get started on your letter.
3. **Get other groups to join your effort.** A letter can be even more impactful if it is signed by Indivisible groups from different districts across your state. This will demonstrate how widespread your position is and signals the unity of the grassroots. If possible, reach out to other groups in your state and ask them to sign on to your letter or send a letter of their own.
4. **Sending the letter.** Different states have different preferences for how they would like to receive these letters. Some have mechanisms to

email letters, others like fax, and still others like snail mail. Your best bet is to call the office of the committee chair you are sending a letter about and ask for advice on how to send the letter. To be clear, you're not calling the committee chair to urge them to vote a certain way (unless you are a constituent) — you're just calling for information.

Media Strategy

Sending your letter to media covering the state legislature is easy to do. Your letter probably won't get a story written about it. But it may be written about and quoted in future stories.

Alternatively, you could **submit your letter as a Letter to the Editor or Op-ed**. Check your newspaper's website to find the email address for the editorial department you should submit your letter to. At the top of your letter, ask if the paper publishes open letters like this and if they have suggestions for future ones. They may not but it's worth a try!

[Check out our resource on how to build a media list.](#)

Committee Letter Template

> Committee Letter Template

<GROUP(S) LOGO(S)>

To:

<FULL NAME OF COMMITTEE CHAIR>, Chair

<FULL NAME OF COMMITTEE>

<DATE>

Re: <BILL NUMBER> (<LAST NAME OF LEAD AUTHOR>) –
<SUPPORT/OPPOSE>

Dear Members of the <COMMITTEE NAME>,

<YOUR GROUP NAME> is pleased to <support/oppose> <BILL NUMBER>, which will <BRIEF ONE SENTENCE OVERVIEW OF WHAT THE BILL DOES>.

<YOUR GROUP NAME> is a grassroots group of energized constituents who have organized in the wake of the 2016 election to fight against the harmful Trump agenda and fight for advancing progressive policies in our communities. We are all volunteers and we come from many different walks of life but are united in our commitment to using grassroots activism to hold our elected officials accountable.

<PARAGRAPH OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROBLEM THE BILL IS TRYING TO SOLVE IN YOUR STATE>

<PARAGRAPH OUTLINING THE PROVISIONS OF THE BILL THAT WILL SOLVE/HARM THOSE PROBLEMS AND WHY YOU SUPPORT/OPPOSE THE BILL>

<YOUR GROUP NAME> strongly <supports/opposes> <BILL NUMBER> and we urge you to vote <in favor of/against> passing this bill out of <COMMITTEE NAME>.

Sincerely,

<GROUP LEADER SIGNATURE>

<GROUP LEADER NAME>

<GROUP NAME>

Appendix 5: Giving public testimony at a legislative hearing

Public testimony at a hearing is the opportunity to be heard directly by the decision makers and potentially influence the outcome of votes. This is an incredibly **powerful way to shape the outcome of policy** and to share your group's perspectives on a piece of legislation. Giving a compelling testimony can spark important debate and sway the opinions of legislators that are on the fence. But don't put all your eggs in this one basket! If committee members haven't heard from you *before* the bill comes up before the

committee, it's too late and even compelling personal testimony won't have the impact you want.

Anatomy of a committee hearing

The exact structure of a committee hearing, of course, varies by state. A committee hearing will often have an agenda of what bills will be heard in that hearing, though they are not always presented in a predetermined order. For each bill, usually the author of the bill will present opening remarks about a bill. Then the committee chair may open time for witnesses from the supporting and opposing sides to present testimonies. The time allotted for public testimony may vary. In some cases, witnesses are allowed a few minutes to present their case. In other cases, each witness may only be allowed to state their name, organization, and position.

If you are considering testifying at a committee hearing, it is a good idea to attend another committee hearing in advance to learn about the procedural intricacies of your state's committee hearings. Some states broadcast their hearings on the internet so you could watch them instead of attending in person.

Preparing remarks

It's a good idea to prepare what you are going to say in your testimony in advance. If you've already submitted a [written testimony](#), you can use summarize those talking points in your oral testimony. If you haven't submitted a written testimony in advance, bring copies of your talking points to give to legislators. Be sure that you know the facts about the issue, your reasons for your position, and some rebuttals for common opposition arguments. Also, make sure to **practice** your testimony ahead of time!

Follow this **general outline** for preparing a good oral testimony:

1. Address the committee chairman and committee members.
2. State your name, where you live, and the organization you are representing.
3. Clearly state whether you support or oppose the bill and be sure to identify the bill by its number and author.

4. Summarize your reasons for your position concisely.
5. Share a personal story or anecdote that relates to the issue if you have one.
6. Restate your position clearly.
7. Thank the committee for their time.

After you write your testimony, there's a good chance you've just written a [letter to the editor](#), so consider submitting it.

Attending the committee hearing

Below are some tips to ensure that your public testimony goes smoothly:

- **Be on time.** On the day of the committee hearing, make sure you arrive to the capitol building early so that you have time to find the appropriate room. Arrive to the hearing room on time.
- **Sign in.** If you are planning to give an oral testimony, a lot of states require you to sign-in as a witness. Some states do this online and others on paper at the hearing. Other states don't require you to sign in and instead will just call for public witnesses at the appropriate time.
- **Distribute your materials.** If you did not submit your testimony in advance, give copies of your testimony to the committee staff for distribution to the legislators.
- **Wait for your bill to be heard.** Bills are not always heard in the order that is written in the agenda and it is often hard to predict when it will be your bill's turn. So you must wait patiently for your bill to be heard.

Giving your testimony

When your bill is up for its hearing, be attentive and listen to the author's presentation. If you have signed up for testimony, wait to be called to the microphone. If there was no sign-in, join the line to speak when the chair calls for witnesses. When you are delivering your testimony, follow these tips:

- Address all inquiries through the committee chair.

- Follow the outline above to deliver your testimony effectively.
- Be concise, direct, and courteous. Don't ramble or yell. It is okay to be passionate, but do not be disrespectful.
- Try not to be nervous. We know it can be intimidating to be addressing elected officials in this venue, but remember that it is their *job* to hear from you!
- Do not repeat previous testimonies. If other witnesses have conveyed ideas similar to your testimony, simply say that you agree with previous speakers and reaffirm your position without being redundant.
- Sometimes, legislators may ask questions. Be prepared to answer their questions. If you don't know how to answer a specific question, it is okay to say that you are not sure and that you will follow up with a written answer to their question.

>> **Opportunities for People with Powerful Personal Stories**

You don't need to be someone who was personally and deeply impacted by the issue that you're testifying about. But if you are personally impacted, you can make a big impact, especially through media.

Introduce yourself to the media. Before your testimony, write an email to reporters you find who have covered this issue. In your email, give a short summary of your personal story. Say you will be working to fight on this bill, and would like to keep in touch. Ask if they will be at the hearing and say you'd like to say hello.

If you have a prepared statement, provide reporters a copy of it. This helps reporters ensure they get the right quote and makes their job much easier for them.

Make sure someone records audio and possibly video of your testimony that can then be sent out to reporters who might be interested in your story but were unable to hear your testimony in person.

Consider writing a letter to the editor or op-ed. Most newspapers have limited space so the more succinct your letter is, the better. You can ask your paper's op-ed editor how long they would like your letter to be but a general guideline is to keep any article under 500 words.

Appendix 6: District office visits

Not all legislatures have district offices, but if yours does, this can be a powerful way to make your voice heard without having to travel to the state capitol. These are public offices, open for anybody to visit — you don't need an appointment, but you could decide to make one ahead of time. You can take advantage of this to stage an impromptu town hall meeting by showing up with a small group. **It is harder to ignore someone in person.**

Before the meeting

- **Schedule your meeting.** First, you should look up the location of your local district office. Contact the office to schedule the meeting ahead of time or just find a time that works for your members. In some states, legislators have pre-determined times where they will be home in district (e.g. Fridays, Mondays, or during recess). If you try to schedule your meeting when they are home, you may have the opportunity to meet with your legislator in person.
 - Once you have a meeting time, [register it on our map!](#)
- **Recruit members from your group to attend the meeting.** Try to work in partnership with other organizations and activists to form a coalition that would support your goals and legislation. Also, coordinate with other local indivisible groups, local activists and marginalized communities. It is important to **follow the lead of impacted groups** to mitigate harm and exclusion.
- **Make an agenda** before you go to your meeting.
 - **Be prepared** with knowledge about the bills you want to discuss and the impact of these different bills on own community. Research your legislator's positions on different issue areas and any past votes on the bill or related bills.
 - **Prepare stories** about how these policies would affect you and others in your community.

- **Assign** a member of your group to prepare and address each talking point or story. Also assign a timekeeper and a notetaker. Divvying up roles helps make the meeting flow smoothly and involve everyone in attendance.
- **Prepare a brief one- or two-page summary memo to leave behind.** If this is your first meeting, include notes on who you are, what you do, and why the topics you discussed in the meeting are important to you. Include your desired outcome and clearly state a detailed ask!

During the meeting

- **Introduce yourselves.** Thank the legislator or staff person for meeting with you and then ask each person in attendance to introduce themselves.
- **Share your talking points.** Have a few people address topics, rather than one or two group leaders.
- **Share stories** about how your representatives decision impacts you or someone in your group personally.
- **Don't settle for non-answers.** If you are not getting responses be firm but polite. Remember: your goal is to talk about the issue and share your concerns.
- **Take notes.** Don't expect your representative or their staff to do this.
- **Leave behind your prepared summary** to give a good impression and remind the legislator that you came prepared for the meeting.
- **Document your meeting with video or pictures.** Record it or it didn't happen. Get a picture of your group at the office. Even better yet, get a video of your group before, during, and/or after. Bottom line, your voice will be louder and better heard if you get documented evidence.

After the meeting

- **Post your takeaways** from the meeting on social media and tag your legislator. Tag @IndivisibleTeam on twitter so we can amplify your work.

- **Follow up** a few days after the meeting by emailing the person who you met with. Ask specific questions about next steps and the decision on your ask. Call the office to follow up and again remember to be firm in getting an actual answer.

Appendix 7: Organizing a legislative lobby day at the state capitol

Constituents flooding a capitol building to lobby their legislators about the issues they care about is a beautiful display of democracy. Organizing a statewide lobby day can be an big undertaking but, if executed properly, can make a significant impact on the outcome of the legislative process while also promoting statewide Indivisible unity. In this toolkit, we walk you through everything you need to organize a lobby day at the state capitol.

> A note on state lobbying laws

Every state has its own laws about lobbying so it's absolutely critical that you learn the laws in your own state so you can figure out if your activities count as lobbying and whether or not you need to do any registration or reporting on your activities. Check out some of the resources below to learn about your state's lobbying laws:

- [NCSL State Lobbyist Definitions](#)
- [NCSL State Lobbying Registration Requirements](#)
- [NCSL State Lobbying Reporting Requirements](#)
- [Bolder Advocacy State Lobbying Registration Thresholds](#)

Collaborating with other Indivisibles and partners

As always, we encourage you to [work with other Indivisible groups](#) in your state to make your lobby day as effective as possible. You should also look to partner organizations for collaboration. If you want to lobby about one specific bill, you should absolutely investigate if there is already a coalition of groups working on the bill to maximize impact in your lobby day. Other

organizations may already be organizing a lobby day that you could offer to help with.

Choosing a strategic date for your lobby day

You will first need to **strategically choose a date** for your lobby day based on your state's legislative calendar. It is generally a good idea to choose a date leading up to a floor vote of your bill because all legislators will be voting when a bill goes to the floor. This also sends a message that you will be watching their vote and sets you up as a force for accountability. Note that you'll likely have to reserve the space well ahead of time. Many other organizations may have similar plans so you want to make sure you reserve spaces/venues with enough time.

Many legislatures have a "crossover" deadline, or a date when bills must pass from the chamber of origin to the second chamber. It could be strategic to plan your lobby day before that deadline or in the final weeks of the legislative session when there is usually a flurry of votes.

Recruiting participants

Once you have chosen a strategic date for your lobby day, you will need to **recruit participants to attend** your lobby day. You should aim to bring at least 20 people to lobby. But the more people you can attract for your event, the better! Ideally, you should look to **bring people from across the state** that represent various state legislative districts. This sends the message that your concerns are shared with constituents statewide.

Helpful tips:

- Talk to your Indivisible organizer for help in recruiting other groups.
- Be sure to create a way for attendees to RSVP for your lobby day and keep track of your participants.
- [Register](#) your lobby day on our Indivisible map so we can help! If you register your event, we'll send an email to let folks in the area know about it.
- Ask attendees for their state legislative districts so you can be sure to match them with their own legislators.

- Always contact all attendees the day before to confirm their participation (and ask them to bring a friend!)

Logistical planning

Plan for a whole day event, with attendees arriving in the morning and departing at the end of the work day. You'll want to spend some time at the beginning of the day gathering folks together and briefing them about the specific issues and bills that you will be lobbying about before groups actually start conducting their lobby visits. Make sure you plan times for meals and rest.

Sample Agenda

- 9:30 - 10:00 Arrival + breakfast
- 10:00 - 11:00 Briefing on bills and issues for lobby day visits
- 11:00 - 11:30 Attendees meet in lobby teams and practice
- 11:30 - 12:30 Groups conduct lobby visits
- 12:30 - 1:30 Lunch
- 1:30 - 4:30 Groups conduct lobby visits
- 4:30 - 5:30 Debrief/ Social time
- 5:30 Departure

Venue

While most of the activity will take place inside of your state capitol building, you may want to **secure a venue to meet for your morning briefing and debrief**, depending on how many people are attending. In some cases, it may be appropriate to just to meet outside the capitol building, but it can be more comfortable to have a room for folks to sit and listen to your morning briefing. If possible, try to find a location that is closely located to the capitol building.

Scheduling legislative lobby meetings

This is the most important, yet logistically heavy task. You should try as best as possible to **schedule meetings with legislators or their legislative staff**

in advance. Once your date is set, you should call or email legislator offices to request a 15-20 minute appointment for your chosen date. You may not be able to schedule a meeting with every single legislator you want so try to prioritize legislators that are on the fence about your particular bill (if you know them). For those that you are unable to nail down an appointment, you can instruct your participants to try to drop in the office. It's also okay to schedule multiple meetings for the same time since you will be dividing up your participants into teams.

> Sample email for scheduling lobby meetings

Dear <NAME>,

Indivisible <STATE> is planning to host a Lobby Day on <DATE> to discuss the issues that are important to the constituents of our state. Specifically, we are hope to discuss <BILL NUMBER> to urge <REPRESENTATIVE NAME> to <SUPPORT/OPPOSE> this legislation because <BRIEF REASON>.

Is there a 15-20 minute time period between <TIME WINDOW> on <DATE> that we would be able to meet with you or the appropriate staff member in your office?

We appreciate the opportunity to meet with your office on <DATE> to discuss the important matters facing our state.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME

INDIVISIBLE GROUP

Forming lobby teams and schedules

After you confirm your RSVPs, you should **divide your attendees into lobby teams** of about 4-5 people per team. Try to prioritize geographical diversity in your lobby team so that each team seems to represent a wide variety of areas in your state. Distribute your scheduled appointments so that each team has approximately the same number of scheduled appointments. When assigning meetings, try to ensure that constituents get the opportunity to meet their *own* legislator's offices.

Morning briefing

Your morning briefing will set the stage for your lobby day. You may want to consider kicking off the briefing with some keynote speakers. For example, you could invite the legislator who is sponsoring the legislation you are there to lobby for, an expert in the field, or a directly impacted individual. Inviting keynote speakers to your briefing is also a great way to get media coverage for your lobby day.

After your keynote speakers, be sure to ask any press to leave so you can focus on the nuts and bolts training for the lobby day. In your training, you should be sure to cover:

- Background on the issue and the problem that the bill is trying to solve
- What the bill actually does
- Main talking points and arguments for why this bill is necessary/important
- Main opposition talking points and rebuttals
- Training for how to do an effective lobby visit

Creating materials for your lobby visits

You will need to create several different materials for your lobby day. For each legislative office, you should prepare a packet for the lobby team to leave behind. Each participant should also have a packet of materials. You may also consider making a powerpoint for your morning briefing that discusses the main talking points and includes tips for good lobby visits

Legislator leave-behind packet

Each team should leave behind some materials with the legislative office:

- Fact sheet about each bill you discuss (not more than 2 bills max)
- Any research or news articles that support your position, especially useful are editorials from papers that cover members' districts

Participant folders

Be sure your participants have all of the materials they need:

- Agenda for the day (customized by attendee based on lobby team)
- Legislative office room numbers (map of building if available)
- Bill talking points (overview of arguments to be made about bill)
- Fact Sheet (same as in legislator packet)
- Meeting report back forms (to be filled out after every visit so you can track the progress of the meetings)

> Consider holding a rally

If you are able to draw a large attendance to your lobby day (e.g. 30+ people), you might consider kicking your lobby day off with a rally or other visible event in front of the capitol building to draw media and press attention to your event. Here are some things to consider when planning a rally:

- Find out if there are other events happening in front of the capitol on the same day. Try to avoid conflict because other events may suck media attention away from your event.
- Get a permit for your event. Most capitol grounds' require a permit for an event.
- Invite notable speakers to your rally (e.g. legislators, experts, impacted individuals).
- Make sure you have a way to amplify sound, whether it be through a megaphone or a podium and sound system.
- Ensure that you have good visuals for any photos (e.g. banners, posters, signs).
- Reach out to press to get them to cover your rally.

Getting media attention

If you're hosting a lobby day, you should absolutely let local reporters and TV producers know to get the event some media attention. Read our resources about [how to get press to cover your event](#) and how to write effective [press releases and media advisories](#).

Most reporter's emails or phone numbers can be found online. Reach out to them - especially if an expert or impacted individual will be speaking at the lobby day. Introduce yourself, the organization you're a part of and what you are trying to accomplish. Provide the reporters with an overview of your plan for the lobby day and any background that could be useful if they are not familiar with the issue. If you can mention something that makes your event stand out (good visuals, specific speaker, high public turnout, part of a larger political narrative, etc.) make sure to flag it. Oftentimes, TV producers will be more interested if they know an event will have good visuals or a lot of people so make sure to specifically flag this when it's applicable

During the lobby day, be sure to **take lots of pictures** and encourage your participants to do the same. Create a uniform #hashtag and make sure participants are posting about it using the hashtag. Tag the local reporters you follow in your posts.

Introduce yourself in person to any reporters that cover your event and ensure they have what they need for their stories. Reporters might want to ask follow up questions so it is good to exchange contact information. Send reporters (even those that didn't show up to the event) any photos, video clips or quotes that they could use in their reporting.

Appendix 8: Coordinated Calls

Mass office calling is a light lift, but it can actually have an impact. A single constituent's call may not make much of an impact, but multiple calls from constituents coordinated on a single topic is sure to be noticed. In contrast to your experiences calling your federal representative, you'll rarely get a busy signal and you might find that the person who answers has the time to have a full conversation with you rather than just registering your opinion in a database. Because state legislators are really not used to hearing much from their constituents and state legislative offices are not heavily staffed, it takes much fewer calls to get noticed. We have been told by state legislative staff that little as 100 calls on a single day could literally **shut down** a legislator's office in California. For states with less staff, even fewer calls could have enormous impact!

When to call

For in-person events, you want to prepare a host of questions, but for calls, keep it simple. You and your group should all agree to call in on **one specific issue** that day. It is most effective to coordinate large numbers of calls for bills at **strategic timepoints**. There are two good times to call a representative about a bill:

1. **Right before a vote:** One hundred constituent calls trickling in over the course of a month has less impact than the same number of calls in one work day near the vote. Whether the vote is in committee or on the floor, calling just before a vote demonstrates that you are knowledgeable and watching. They are also much more likely to remember your call since the vote is upcoming.
2. **Right after a vote:** If your rep didn't do what you wanted, call to let their staff know how disappointed you are that they are not representing your interests.

What to call about

The most important thing is to **be specific**. Tell your representative exactly how you want them to vote on a specific bill or give them a concrete idea for a piece of new legislation. This gives you **leverage to hold them accountable**. Don't make vague requests like "I want the Senator to protect the environment." There is no way to measure whether or not they did what you asked. On the other hand if you say something like "I want the Senator to vote yes on SB 100 that would advance our renewable energy standards in committee tomorrow," you will have a concrete way to hold your representative accountable.

Writing a call script

An easy way to encourage your group members to participate in your call campaign is to **provide them with a pre-written script**. This lowers the barrier to participate and can ease the nerve of folks who are hesitant to make calls. Your script should be brief and include who you are, where you are from, and a clear and strong ask.

> Call Script Template

Hi, my name is <NAME> and I live in <TOWN>. I am a constituent of <REPRESENTATIVE TITLE + NAME> and I am calling to let <REPRESENTATIVE TITLE + NAME> know that I strongly <SUPPORT/OPPOSE> <BILL NUMBER> that would <ONE SENTENCE DESCRIPTION ABOUT WHAT THE BILL DOES>. <ONE OR TWO SENTENCES ABOUT WHY YOU CARE ABOUT THIS ISSUE>.

Can I count on <REPRESENTATIVE TITLE+NAME> to vote <YES/NO> on <BILL NUMBER> when it is heard <IN COMMITTEE/ON THE FLOOR> <DATE, IF KNOWN>?

> Example

Hi, my name is Maria and I live in Berkeley. I am a constituent of Senator Skinner and I am calling to let her know that I strongly support SB 822 that would enact net neutrality in California. It is important to me that content on the internet is equally accessible to all.

Can I count on Senator Skinner to vote YES on SB 822 when it is heard on the Senate floor next week?

Making the calls

1. Ask to speak to the staffer who handles the issue (immigration, health care, etc.).
2. Recite your script and ask.
3. Take notes on everything that is discussed. Try to get direct quotes — anything that is discussed is public information that can be shared widely.
4. Compare notes with the rest of your group, and identify any conflicts in what they're telling constituents.

ALWAYS CALL YOUR OWN REPRESENTATIVE

Advocating for important legislation that affects **your community** is a valuable skill, that should be strategically wielded for making an impact. You may feel motivated to advocate for your friends, neighbors, and other people

affected in other parts of the state, especially when your member is not a key decision maker (e.g. they aren't on the policy committee that it is hearing the bill). But It is only impactful when you **contact your own representative**. Calling representatives that are not yours is *actually counterproductive* to successfully deploying constituent power. When legislators receive too many calls from out-of-district, they can use that excuse as a reason to dismiss *all* of the calls they receive, including from their own constituents. **By calling out-of-district, you are undermining the voices of *real* constituents.** If your legislator is not a key decision maker, use your time instead to reach out to your fellow Indivisibles who are in those key districts and ask *them* to make calls. This is why collaborating with fellow Indivisibles can be so powerful.

Read our [resource](#) detailing why there are **no exceptions to the rule** of calling your own representatives.