

RESOURCE GUIDE

Scheduling Meetings and Educating
U.S. Congressional Representatives

2017 NATIONAL SUMMIT ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

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The Intersection of Policy & Practice

Overview

For years, the National Network for Youth has encouraged lawmakers to address the most urgent needs of runaway and homeless youth. In order to achieve this goal, we need help from individuals and organizations like you! On the morning of March 14th, Summit attendees will have the opportunity to educate Congress about our movement. Get ready for Hill Day 2017!

We have prepared this guide to help coordinate your efforts on Capitol Hill. Before reaching out to lawmakers, please read **Part I: Contacting Your Federal Representatives**. After scheduling these meetings, we advise you to review **Part II: Preparing for Your Visit**.

On the first day of our Summit, NN4Y will distribute fact sheets to all attendees. In the spirit of coordinated action, we encourage everyone to distribute these documents to lawmakers. You're also welcome to hand out brochures, business cards and other information from your organization. And don't forget – **personal stories are your most effective tool!**

Thank you for participating in Hill Day 2017. We hope you enjoy the National Summit on Youth Homelessness!

Part I: Contacting Your Federal Representative

Hill Day 2017 begins on the phone! To schedule meetings, you should contact your Members of Congress **as soon as possible**. We encourage all attendees to schedule visits on the same day – **Tuesday, March 14th from 9:00am to 12:00pm**. If your representative is unavailable at that time, ask to meet with someone else in the office. Be prepared to speak with a young (and potentially inexperienced) staffer or intern!

To place a successful call, please adhere to the following steps:

1. **Determine whom to call.** Everyone in the United States has two Senators and one Representative. If you work far from home, you might also be able to meet with that district's Representative. To find the names and phone number for your Senators, please [consult this tool](#). To find the name and phone number for your Representative, please [consult this tool](#). If you already know their names, you can also [search here](#). Be sure to call their 202 area code!
2. **Call your offices directly.** If you do not have the direct number, you can reach U.S. Representatives by calling 202-225-3121, and U.S. Senators by calling 202-224-3121. Ask the operator to connect you to the individual office.
3. **Let them know that you are a constituent.** Elected officials are most eager to meet their own constituents, so make sure to mention where you are from.
4. **Tell them you will be in DC and want to meet with your representative.** Let them know you will be visiting DC for the National Network for Youth's National Summit on Youth Homelessness. As a constituent, you have a right to meet with your federal representatives!
5. **Communicate that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss a local issue--youth homelessness in the representative's district.** He or she is responsible for issues that directly affect constituents, including homelessness.
6. **Note your expertise.** Be sure to mention the provider that you represent and the professional experience you have on the issue of youth homelessness. It will help to establish your credibility!
7. **If your representative is not available on the day requested, ask to meet with an aide who handles youth homelessness policy.** Staffers are responsible for the majority of work in your Congressional office. Most constituents meet with a Legislative Assistant, but try to get hold of the Chief of Staff or Legislative Director.

Part II: Preparing for Your Visit

Don't take your newly scheduled meeting for granted! This is a significant opportunity for you and other attendees to present a united front on Capitol Hill. To ensure the most successful meeting possible, please reference the following tips:

- **Discuss your organization.** Why was it created, and how does it fulfill the needs of runaway and homeless youth in your community? Make sure to reference the following points:
 - 1) Throughout the country, homelessness results in crises for youth and families.
 - 2) We have programs that prevent or otherwise address homelessness, and therefore mitigate these crises.
 - 3) **However**, these solutions are not scaled to capacity because of a lack of resources.
 - 4) As a result, youth and families continue to suffer unnecessarily.
 - 5) In order to interrupt this cycle, the lawmaker must **act now**.
- **Explain the local issues.** What is the prevalence of youth homelessness in your area? What population(s) do you serve? Remember, you and the lawmaker share an interest in the same community!
- **Speak about your program.** How does your organization operate? Who do you collaborate with? Take care to mention schools, law enforcement, child welfare, juvenile justice and other partners.
- **Highlight program-specific data.** Include 1) the number of youth served annually, 2) the number of youth turned away due to insufficient capacity, 3) the positive outcomes of your services and 4) any other indicators of your program's effectiveness.
- **Discuss your organization's success in serving runaway and homeless youth.** How effective is your program? Why is there a need to sustain these services? How does your organization focus on family reconnection, education and employment?
- **What federally funded grants have helped you serve homeless youth?** Don't assume that representatives or congressional aides understand the exact relationship between federal funding and homeless youth programs. Explain exactly which federal agencies or grants the money comes from, and how it supports your work.
- **Discuss whether funding for your program has decreased.** If this is the case, mention how it has affected the quality of services in your community.
- **Share stories from personal experience.** Federal representatives meet with dozens of advocates each week. To ensure that your visit stands out, make sure to reference real-life anecdotes and experiences. How have you and your program changed lives in the community?

POLICY ASKS

During the meeting, you may be tempted to discuss an endless number of policy- or funding-related complaints related to your organization. However, the most productive conversations are framed in terms of potential solutions. Accordingly, be prepared to offer concrete and realistic ways in which the lawmaker can address each issue.

Before setting off for Capitol Hill, NN4Y will help you prepare specific and goal-oriented “asks” for your meeting. Specifically, we will equip attendees with relevant policy updates, fact sheets and other advocacy tools to facilitate real solutions!

If your lawmaker has been supportive of runaway and homeless youth programs, be sure to thank them for their support! This can include previous sponsorship of legislation impacting runaway and homeless youth, or support for work within the community. Because 2017 is the first year of a new biennial Congress, we need every lawmaker, whether or not they have cosponsored legislation before. Be sure to finish each meeting making these specific “asks” of your lawmaker.

INVITE FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE AND STAFF TO VISIT YOUR ORGANIZATION

Like anyone else, lawmakers learn and benefit most from first-hand experiences. Therefore, you should kindly encourage elected officials (or their staff) to visit your organization and meet the young people it serves. To avoid interfering with his or her legislative responsibilities, check these [Senate](#) and [House](#) calendars to see when Congress is out of session. That’s when lawmakers are usually back at home, and most willing to visit organizations in the community! Remember – this is an opportunity for your Congressman to show solidarity with constituents.

FOLLOW-UP

Congressmen are busy people, and they deserve your gratitude! Lawmakers and their staff may ask you for more information or materials, or specific policy questions that you don’t know the answer to. If you don’t know, or are unsure of the answer, that’s okay! NN4Y staff can help you in following up to address their questions.

After thanking the lawmaker and his or her staff in person, make sure to ask for business cards. You should follow up in writing as soon as possible – especially if you offered to provide additional information or materials. Finally, consider sending a thank you note from a young person involved in your program!