

## Tips for Contacting Your Member of Congress

Created by the [California Library Association](#) and [EveryLibrary](#)

- If you are an employee, be careful about political activity on work time. Make calls, write letters, etc. on your own time and using your own phone, computer, etc. not your work one. The rules are a bit different if your **job** is to advocate for your library, but unless you are in that position play it safe and don't use work time or resources.
- Elected officials care deeply about being re-elected - so they really only want to hear from voters in their District. You can still call or write, but your input will carry much less weight (if any) if you are not a constituent.
- If you need to find out how to contact your Member of Congress you can check here - <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>
- Contacting members of the Appropriations Committee is critical. If you are represented by one of these Members of Congress then your efforts are REALLY important.
  - <http://appropriations.house.gov/about/members/>
  - Calvert, 42<sup>nd</sup> District (Corona/IE) <http://calvert.house.gov/>
  - Valadao, 21<sup>st</sup> District (Hanford) <https://valadao.house.gov/>
  - Roybal-Allard, 40<sup>th</sup> District (Commerce) <http://roybal-allard.house.gov/>
  - Lee, 13<sup>th</sup> District (East Bay) <http://lee.house.gov/>
  - Aguilar, 31<sup>st</sup> District (San Bernardino/IE) <https://aguilar.house.gov/>
- Advocacy that requires effort is valued - the more effort, the more they care - calls, personal emails, faxes/letters, and especially showing up in person in the District office are all effective ways of voicing your concerns.
- Focus on a single issue - in this case opposition to President Trump's budget and the elimination of IMLS funding.
- Do your homework. Before you call or write find out if the Member of Congress has already taken a position or made a statement on this issue. If they have, and it supports our position, thank them. Even if you know they are supportive, still call or write. They need ammunition for congressional hearings. Learn what issues are important to them, and try to connect those to our cause - e.g. "I know Congresswoman X is interested in supporting veterans. She might be interested to know that our library received an IMLS grant last year that enabled us to teach 100 veterans to search for a job."
- Letters have to be screened for anthrax, etc. so can take a couple of weeks to get to the Congressional office. If you are going to write, then send your letter as a fax or attach it

to an email. Postcards work too!

- **MAKING PHONE CALLS:**

- Keep it **brief**. The Congressional offices are being flooded with calls on all kinds of topics. You may only get voicemail. If so, leave a message. Introduce yourself, give your zip code (that's how they track if you are a constituent), and then say you are calling "to ask Congressperson xxx to oppose President Trump's budget, and in particular the defunding of the Institute of Museum and Library Services."

If you have the opportunity you can say how much your library has received in IMLS grants (look that up here - <https://www.library.ca.gov/grants/lsta/all/default.aspx>) and/or give a **very brief** description of how the Member of Congress's constituents have benefitted from IMLS funding - e.g. "thanks to an IMLS grant via the State Library xyz library was able to teach 100 veterans how to search for a job."

Then thank the staff person for their time and say goodbye.

(Note: If the staff member you speak to indicates that the Member of Congress agrees with our position, you could ask if s/he would be willing to make a public statement or specifically mention libraries in any public statements made in opposition to the budget.)

- Calls work! If you are nervous about calling you might want to read this - <http://actionfriday.tumblr.com/post/153358069831/shy-persons-guide-to-calling-representatives>

- **WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS:**

- Written communications (emails/faxes) give you an opportunity to provide more information. If you are writing on behalf of your library or Friends group, include a paragraph about it and all of the wonderful services you provide. Say how much you have received in IMLS grants in the past 5 years and how those projects benefitted constituents. You can look that up here <https://www.library.ca.gov/grants/lsta/all/default.aspx>. If you have a poignant example of how a grant project has changed someone's life, tell the story (again, briefly!)
- If you are writing personally and not on behalf of your organization you can talk about how important libraries are to you and your community, and, if you have

any, give examples of how IMLS funds have made a difference.

- Consider writing a letter to the editor of your local paper alerting your community about the impact of President Trump's budget on your library. Again use data and personal examples. Encourage community members to contact the Member of Congress.

- **OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE ACTION:**

- If you are not a member of the [California Library Association](#) - join! Your membership supports our advocacy efforts.
- Support [EveryLibrary](#) - the only national organization dedicated exclusively to political action at a local level to create, renew, and protect public funding for libraries of all types.
- If you want to organize your community around this issue or other library issues, consider organizing and hosting a house party. Getting a group of people together to make phone calls, write letters, or sign postcards can be very effective. EveryLibrary has created a guide to hosting house parties—available here <http://action.everylibrary.org/houseparties>—and will work with you to make it successful.
- EveryLibrary also has a petition you may want to sign [http://action.everylibrary.org/preserve\\_funding\\_for\\_the\\_neh\\_nea\\_and\\_pbs](http://action.everylibrary.org/preserve_funding_for_the_neh_nea_and_pbs)
- Ask your friends and relatives in other States to contact *their* Member of Congress - especially if they are on the Appropriations Committee

The Indivisible Guide, written by former Congressional staffers, has some great advice - <https://www.indivisibleguide.com/> -

#### YOUR MOC CARES A LOT ABOUT

Verified constituents from the district (or state for Senators)

Advocacy that requires effort — the more effort, the more they care: calls, personal emails, and especially showing up in person in the district

#### YOUR MOC DOESN'T CARE MUCH ABOUT

People from outside the district (or state for Senators)

Form letters, a tweet, or a Facebook comment (unless they generate widespread attention)

Local press and editorials, maybe national press	Wonky D.C.-based news (depends on the MoC)
An interest group's endorsement	Your thoughtful analysis of the proposed bill
Groups of constituents, locally famous individuals, or big individual campaign contributors	A single constituent
Concrete asks that entail a verifiable action — vote for a bill, make a public statement, etc.	General ideas about the world
A single ask in your communication — letter, email, phone call, office visit, etc.	A laundry list of all the issues you're concerned about

## WHAT YOUR MOC IS THINKING: GOOD OUTCOME VS. BAD OUTCOME

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

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

