

How To: Advocacy during COVID-19 with Online Issue Briefs

RCRC ISSUE BRIEFS

BACKGROUND

The issue briefs are a reflection of five years of community-based work in six communities across the United States and its territories throughout the Resilient Children/Resilient Communities (RCRC) Initiative. With the help of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University's Earth Institute, community voices from the six RCRC communities have identified these issue areas as topics requiring policymakers' attention for fostering childhood resilience in disasters.



How to Use the Issue Briefs as an Advocacy Tool

Access the issue briefs: <https://rcrctoolbox.org/rcrc-issue-briefs/>

The issue briefs are designed to be used by the RCRC communities and all other American constituencies seeking to elevate children's disaster resilience to the attention of local, state, and federal legislators or other decision-makers. These reports can also be used by legislators and decision-makers at all levels as informative briefs to better understand the issues faced by communities in disasters as of 2021.

Each issue brief is designed to stand alone and can be shared by itself, or in tandem with the other topics. Each report begins with the testimonials of residents and leaders within the six RCRC communities followed by a data-driven national outlook. All readers are encouraged to explore the topics and voices that most resonate with their own community.

These reports, along with the interactive graphics, are free to use as aids in elevating these key issues and in contributing to increased understanding of children's resilience in disasters.

The issues addressed within these reports are:

- **Childcare:** [Treating childcare as an essential service during disasters](#)
- **Broadband:** [Expanding broadband access, especially in rural areas](#)
- **Mental Health:** [Increasing mental health resources for children affected by disasters](#)
- **Housing and Sheltering:** [Prioritizing stable housing programs and kid-friendly shelters](#)
- **Food Security:** [Prolonging emergency food security programs in impoverished areas](#)

In addition, a full summary of all recommendations and community testimonials can be found on the summary page <https://rcrctoolbox.org/rcrc-issue-briefs/summary/>.

When reaching out to elected officials and other decision makers, some of the following tips may be useful. A full Congressional advocacy planning guide can be located within the RCRC toolbox: <https://rcrctoolbox.org/toolbox/checklist-congressional-visit>.

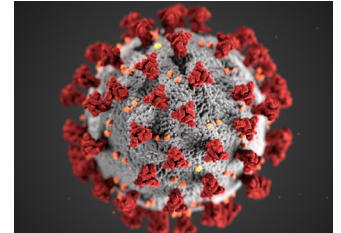
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The Basics of COVID vs. Non-COVID Advocacy

Usually, advocacy follows the flow of: research → outreach → visit → follow up; typically an in-person visit is hosted by a member of the elected official's staff rather than the official themselves.

However, due to the remote requirements stemming from COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, advocacy is less likely to be occurring as in-person meetings on Capitol Hill or in local offices. For the most part, the process is very similar, except that an in-person visit to your representative may be replaced with a phone conversation instead. Note that this may change on a case-by-case basis, and it is worth contacting your local representative's office to see if they are taking meetings with proper COVID-19 precautions in place.



Do:

- Develop talking points before the meeting to make certain you stay on message
- Clearly identify yourself as a constituent
- Show linkages with specific legislation or programs where possible
- Provide reliable data or fact sheets
- Be positive and friendly
- Be sensitive about time, since meetings are often cut short
- Treat staff with the same level of respect as you do the official
- Compliment the member or staff on positive actions
- Admit if you don't know an answer, but promise to follow up
- Leave your name and contact information
- Send a thank you note
- Follow-up with any additional information needed

Before you reach out to your elected official's office...

- Review talking points to help prepare you to discuss important issues, tell a story, and make an ask with your elected officials.
 - The issues are summarized in an Executive Summary at the top of each brief
 - A community story is highlighted as the second section in each brief

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Before you reach out to your elected official's office... *(continued)*

- ▶ Graphics can also help to tell a story visually and these can be shared screen-to-screen in a video call as a point of reference
- ▶ “The Ask” is the most important part of a Congressional meeting, and some “asks” are included in the Recommendations section at the bottom of each brief; however, these recommendations are not exhaustive and advocates should feel free to use whatever “ask” best suits your community needs.
- Condense your plan into an agenda for your meeting. Adjust the timing of the agenda based on the length of your meeting time once it is scheduled.
- Identify, recruit, and engage a local champion to bring a voice of community support as you engage with your member of Congress.
 - ▶ Some community voices are highlighted at the top of each issue brief in a quote. You can also direct your elected officials’ attention to their constituent voices here.
 - ▶ Congressional representatives care the most about their constituents’ voices – make sure constituents are present and speaking.
- Prepare a one-page document including a brief agenda and some background information that tells your community’s disaster story and be sure to include basic facts, statistics, and local impact; conclude it with your ask(s).
 - ▶ You can pick and choose from among all the briefs and summarize them in a document for your elected officials, focusing on the pieces most relevant to your community.
 - ▶ Plan to send this to the officials’ staff before your meeting and possibly again immediately after as a follow-up.

Reaching out to your Congressional office...

- Understand that you will likely not hear from or speak with your elected official, but a member of their staff instead.
- Request a meeting time and briefly state what the topic is – note that children in disasters is a bi-partisan issue with broad support.

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Reaching out to your Congressional office... *(continued)*

- Develop a plan for what you would like to discuss, specifically your talking points regarding disaster funding and key legislation for children and emergencies.
 - ▶ The issue briefs contain much of this information, particularly within the national narrative and recommendations (last 2 sections of each brief).
 - ▶ Prepare a very short (50 words or 30 seconds) “elevator pitch” that succinctly summarizes your concerns.
- Follow the instructions provided by staff for attending the meeting, make note of any particulars regarding accessing your remote meeting location.
- Coordinate with internal staff the day before the visit: confirm timing, attendees, log-in information (if remote), and the agenda.

Having a remote or in-person meeting with your elected official’s office...

- Be sensitive to timing, in case the meeting starts late or is cut short.
- Review the plan to ensure all timeframes are reasonable and to develop contingency plans (if necessary).
- Assign a person the task of taking pictures during the visit (if visiting in person) as well as to take notes about what the elected official or staff person expressed the most interest in.
- If remotely meeting share your screen (if possible) or send resources ahead of time so that staff can follow along with visuals to help with your story.
- Make a specific, direct ask for action, in a way that holds your Representative accountable.

Following up...

- Send a “thank you” letter and pictures (if applicable) to the elected official’s office.
- Follow-up with congressional staff on any questions raised and by providing additional information.
- Consider asking the elected official to submit a statement for the Congressional Record about the visit.