

NEIGHBOR to NEIGHBOR VISITS 2014

Visit your Representatives in their home offices

What are Neighbor to Neighbor Visits?

When Members of Congress know that their constituents care about immigrants' rights, they vote accordingly. Establishing and fostering relationships with your Senators and Representatives is crucial to enacting immigration reform. Every Senator and Representative has an office – often multiple offices – in their home state. They work from these local offices during "congressional recess," making it convenient for your voice to be heard (see last page of this toolkit for the House Calendar). Neighbor to Neighbor visits are meetings that you and others in your community set up with your Members of Congress and/or their staff to urge them to support compassionate immigration reform. Since the Senate has passed its immigration reform bill, this toolkit will focus primarily on members of the House of Representatives.

Purpose of Neighbor to Neighbor In-District Visits

1. To persuade your Representative to vote for immigration reform that prioritizes family unity and provides meaningful access to citizenship for undocumented immigrants
2. To put our faith into action to make sure your Representative understands that their constituents and people of faith care about immigrants
3. To build relationships between people of faith and public officials who make decisions that impact our communities

It is important to meet with your Representative early on to urge them to support immigration reform based on the [LIRS five core principles](#), and it will also be important to meet with them after a House immigration bill is introduced to discuss specific provisions.

Theological Grounding

Hospitality for newly arrived neighbors is supported by the sacred texts of all faiths, and is rooted in the inherent value and human rights of all individuals. As Lutherans, we are called to bear prophetic witness to God's love for all people, and our special roots as an immigrant church require us to stand in solidarity with migrants and refugees. We must maintain pressure on the House of Representatives to follow the lead of the Senate and pass a bill that includes a roadmap to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, improves the lives of refugees and asylum seekers, keeps families together, includes humane and just enforcement, and protects U.S. citizen and migrant workers.

You may want to lift up these and other texts during your visits or in preparation for them, reflecting on the importance of this work.

Jesus teaches that in welcoming the sojourner, we welcome Jesus himself: *"I was a stranger and you welcomed me"* (Matthew 25:35). The ethic between neighbors that Jesus models and teaches for all of his followers to exemplify is found in the Good Samaritan story, when he defines who the good neighbor is as *"the one who showed mercy"* (Luke 10:37).

Planning your Neighbor to Neighbor Visit

BEFORE THE VISIT

- 1. Get a team together:** Before you meet with your Representative, get a team together. A team ideally includes faith leaders, members of your congregation, business owners, people whose lives have been directly impacted by the immigration system, people who volunteer or work teaching English or resettling refugees, etc. Be strategic in finding team members who best represent your community's call for immigration reform, who can commit to building an ongoing relationship with the Representative, and community leaders who the Representative may already know or respect. Aim for 5-10 participants for a visit, though a larger group can be a powerful sign of support. If you are considering a larger group, check with the Representative's scheduler to see how many people their office can accommodate, and be sure to plan well, so that you are focused on your message and everyone knows their specific roles.
- 2. Learn about who represents your community in Congress:** Go to www.house.gov to find out which House members represent you and your surrounding community. Their websites and an internet search will show how they have voted before and what they have said about immigration reform, as well as biographical sketches, campaign statements, occupation, religion, political and social memberships, areas of interest, and positions on other issues, all of which can inform your approach to the meeting.
- 3. Know his/her record on Immigration Reform:** Find out how your Representative votes on immigration. Their websites and an internet search will you a good picture of their voting record and what they have said about immigration reform. This can be supplemented by contacting the LIRS office for additional information we have about the Representative.
- 4. Have a plan:** The LIRS [guide](#) to meeting with your elected officials walks you through how to prepare for and structure a meeting with a Congressional office. Before you visit your Representative, *always* meet with the other participants to assign roles, including the facilitator, the personal story, specific issue area points, and the 'ask'. Practice by role playing before the day of your meeting so that everyone feels comfortable with their role and knows what to do. You may also want to include other materials, such as news clippings of relevant local events and fact sheets showing that immigration reform has broad support and is good for the economy.

The Facilitator will kick off the meeting by introducing your group, explaining the purpose for the meeting, and providing space for each person attending to briefly introduce themselves. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.

The Personal Story is key to every meeting. Someone should be present who has either been directly impacted by the broken immigration system, or has worked closely with individuals who have been separated from family members, detained or deported. Telling these stories will show how peoples' lives are impacted and how your community needs immigration reform.

Specific Issue Points: There will be specific points your group will want to make about immigration reform, including but not limited to the importance of family unity and meaningful access to full citizenship, and what those mean to your community. It will be helpful to have one person take on each of these issues to show they are distinctly important. See the [LIRS five core immigration reform principles](#) to choose other points to emphasize.

The Ask is the critical part of the visit when you ask “Can we count on your support for immigration reform that prioritizes family unity and provides meaningful access to full citizenship?” Listen carefully and ask for clarification if what they say is vague.

- 5. Schedule a meeting:** Call, email or fax the local offices of your Representative to request a meeting with the member to discuss immigration reform. Make sure to tell them how many other faith leaders and community members would like to attend with you. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with a staffer who works on immigration issues. Be persistent and don’t be discouraged if you need to follow-up in order to get a meeting scheduled.

DURING THE VISIT

Below is a suggested framework, but please adapt it to fit your team and Member of Congress.

Introductions: The Facilitator should start the meeting by thanking the Representative for their time, introducing the group as a whole, and then having each person introduce themselves. Each participant should state the faith community they represent to show the power of the group.

People of faith throughout (town/city/state) are committed to acting out our faith by being good neighbors to immigrant families and building stronger, more welcoming communities. We do this by (Include a story of the work your community has done in support of immigrants – anything from ESL classes, to legal clinics, to advocacy, to other ministries).

We count you, Representative _____, as our neighbor, too. We commend you for demonstrating the hospitality of our community by (If possible, find some comments or legislation the member has worked on in support of immigrant communities).

We’d also like to ask how you plan to be a good neighbor to immigrant workers and families going forward, especially as we work toward immigration reform this year. Some of us would like to share about the specific parts of immigration reform that we care about. Let’s start with introductions (everyone should introduce themselves and their affiliation)

Personal Story: Someone should share a personal story showing the need for immigration reform.

Specific Issue Points: Provide the Representative or staff relevant materials, including LIRS [Statement on the House Leadership’s Principles for Immigration Reform](#) and [LIRS analysis of the piecemeal approach in the House](#). Explain why specific issues, such as family unity and full citizenship, are important to your community.

Meaningful Access to Full Citizenship – Currently, there is no way for someone who is undocumented, including undocumented youth, to become documented. Immigration reform must create a process by which undocumented immigrants can access lawful permanent residency (a “green card”) and have meaningful opportunities to apply for citizenship. Proposals that would create a path to temporary legal status but make citizenship unobtainable are not consistent with how people of faith live out the commandment ‘to welcome the stranger’.

Family Unity – Families are the basic unit of strong communities. Thousands of families have been separated by detention and deportation, and should be reunited. Lengthy visa backlogs force families to choose between being separated for extended periods of time or illegally entering the country. Immigration reform must strengthen the family immigration system, including by processing backlogged

applications and maintaining all family categories (currently U.S. citizens can apply for their spouse, children, parents and siblings, and “green card” holders can apply for their spouse and children).

Make your ask: We believe that in order to truly be good neighbors to our immigrant brothers and sisters, we must recognize the contributions and value they bring. Can we count on your support for immigration reform that prioritizes family unity and full citizenship? How can we best support you in our mutual goal?

Listen well and take notes. Much of advocacy involves listening, providing opportunities for the member to ask questions, looking for indications of the members’ views, and finding opportunities to provide helpful information or correct misinformation. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard instead of only being talked at. Ask questions and engage in conversation. Answer questions honestly. If you don’t know the answer, say that you don’t know but you will find out. Assign one person in the group to follow up.

Thank you & invitation: Thank them and invite them to an upcoming prayer vigil, service or event you are planning. Offer to be a resource to them, and remember to get the staffers' business cards. Consider asking them to take a photo with your group – most politicians love the photo opp!

AFTER THE VISIT

Debrief your meeting

It’s important to make sure you and your group are on the same page immediately after leaving the meeting, while the conversation is fresh in your mind. Make sure to leave the office building, so your debrief conversation can’t be overheard. As a group, review: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? Choose one person to send a follow up email attaching the documents mentioned, providing answers to questions that came up during the meeting, and continuing to engage the member and staff in your group’s work. It’s also important to evaluate your group’s work. How did we do as a team? Share the information learned during your meeting with your state coalition, immigrants' rights groups, and other allies.

Follow up with your Member of Congress

Send the staff you met an email thanking them for their time, attaching any documents you mentioned, providing answers to questions that came up during the meeting, once again making your case for immigration reform, and inviting them to an upcoming event.

Call Washington, DC

The Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121 can connect you to the DC offices of your Representative. Introduce yourself as a constituent and ask for the staffer who works on immigration. Tell them about your meeting with their local office, ask what they are doing to champion immigration reform, and urge them to support family unity and full citizenship in immigration reform. Oftentimes the local and DC offices do not communicate about visits, so it’s important to follow up with the DC office as well.

Let us know how your visit went

For the most up-to-date information on the progress of immigration reform bill in the House, please visit our [website](#) in advance of your meeting. Please let us know how your meeting went. It is important for our advocacy team to continue to gather up-to-date information on where your Representative stands on immigration reform. After you meet with your Representative, please send a brief report of the meeting to our advocacy team at dc@lirs.org. We will then follow up with the member’s staff on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC to reinforce your meeting.

Calendar of the House of Representatives: <http://majorityleader.gov/Calendar/>
 (Representatives will be in their local offices on un-shaded weekdays)

113th Congress, Second Session

HOUSE CALENDAR

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