

ACS Climate Change Advocacy Workshop

Audio Transcript: (4) Module 4: Climate change communications

4.1 Climate conversations with policymakers

4.1.1 So, you want to be an advocate for climate change

As a constituent, you can reach out to your Congresspeople and set up a meeting. Advocating for climate change issues is no different. This section will discuss some important considerations and components to these meetings. Keeping these in mind will help to ensure a successful meeting.

4.1.2 A good ‘ask’

Your ‘ask’ is the reason you are engaging with your policymakers. It’s what you want the member of Congress to do or maybe not do. It’s the proposal you want them to support or not support. An ask to your Congressperson on climate change issues could be to:

- co-sponsor, or in other words support, a piece of climate change legislation,
- Join the climate change caucus,
- Or support additional funding for climate change research or impacts. The latter is particularly relevant during the appropriations timeframe when the budget for the entire federal government is considered.

For each meeting, aim for one or two asks and remember to tell them your ‘ask’ early and, without being annoying, repeatedly. To learn more about the climate change caucus as you build your ask, click on the icon in the bottom right.

4.1.3 Do your research

You will want to do some quick searching to figure out who your policymaker is, the topics they support, and the area or location they represent. Their website and congress.gov can be a good place to start. Ask yourself: do they support a lot of climate change legislation, or do they not come near it? Do they support topics that relate indirectly to the impacts felt by climate change? Do they fall somewhere in between? Could they be persuaded to care more? Questions like these can help look beyond your Congressperson’s political party and voting patterns and into broader issues that are or could be impacted by climate change.

4.1.4 Key components for messages

Regardless of who your policymakers are and what they support, you will have to modify your message to each of them accordingly, particularly if you are engaging more than one individual. For each message, it is important to have three main components: a compelling story; tailored data; and a good ‘ask’. Modifying your message based on what you know about your audience and what they might be receptive to is key! The next few slides will dive deeper.

4.1.5 Compelling stories

A story can go a long way, especially when talking about something as complex and intertwined as climate change. Stories and analogies are easy to recall, which makes them effective when policymakers are trying to remember why something you said is important or when they are trying to prove why action on a given issue is critical. For stories or analogies you share, consider your own experiences and surroundings with climate change as they can be more powerful. For example, a talking point noting 1 to 2 degrees of global warming does not sound disastrous. Instead, someone might better understand if you use the example that, “the Earth has a fever,” and explain that similar to how dangerous a person’s 101-degree fever when sick can be, the Earth warming a few degrees is actually a really big deal.

4.1.6 Tailoring data

If you use scientific data or statistics in your meeting – which you should – it’s important to remember a few things. First, keep it simple, do not overwhelm your audience with a ton of numbers. Second, make it impactful - choose a piece of data that relates closely to your message and your policymaker’s state or district. For example, a data point about elevating sea levels will not matter to a policymaker in Wyoming. Third, stick to reliable sources, peer-reviewed scientific journals, National Academies reports, federal agency webpages, etc. Remember, data in context is easier to comprehend than just numbers on their own. “Before and after” types of data can also be a helpful strategy for guiding your audience.

4.1.7 Overarching tips

Climate change is a hot button issue and fraught with topics of disagreement. In order to be the best champion for climate change, it is important to keep to appropriate behavior. Below are a few tips when engaging in climate change advocacy with policymakers.

ALWAYS be respectful. Aim for a warm, pleasant, and engaging conversation even if you do not always come away in agreement. Progress will be made not by provoking fights, but by enlisting partners. Individuals can change their mind; however, they are unlikely to turn to someone with whom they had an unpleasant engagement with, regardless of their expertise. Finally, remember to research each individual that you meet with, so you can know where they are coming from and so you can find common ground.

4.1.8 Transition

In the next section you will put these concepts into practice with an activity.

4.2 Do’s and Don’ts

4.2.1 Example 1

For this section, you will see phrases outlining actions you should or should not take when engaging with members of Congress. Read the statement on the left. Then click ‘True’ – which indicates ‘Do’ - OR ‘False’ – which indicates ‘Don’t’ – then click ‘Check’ to verify your answer.

The first example states: Assume your Congressperson’s priorities based on their political party. Click True if this is something you should do in a meeting, or False if it is something you don’t do in a meeting. The next slide will explain in more detail.

4.2.2 Example 1 answer

Don't assume your Congressperson's priorities based on their political party. Instead, DO research your member of Congress and their priorities. As noted earlier, checking their websites and legislative record on Congress.gov are excellent ways of identifying their priorities.

4.2.3 Example 2

The second example states: Overwhelm them with a ton of data. Click True if this is something you should do in a meeting, or False if it is something you don't do in a meeting.

4.2.4 Example 2 answer

Don't overwhelm your Congressperson with a lot of data. Instead, DO bring a story or analogy to complement your request and a handful of data points. Too much data will be counterproductive to your meetings' goals.

4.2.5 Example 3

The third example states: Chat away and wait until the end to make your ask. Click True if this is something you should do in a meeting, or False if it is something you don't do in a meeting.

4.2.6 Example 3 answer

Don't chat away or wait until the end of your meeting to make your ask. Instead, DO aim for clear and concise talking points and state your ask early on. Remember, these engagements are a dialogue. It is just as important to understand what the member of Congress is doing on your issue as it is to state what you want them to do.

4.2.7 Example 4

The final example states: Talk about the issue from a global or national perspective and the bigger picture. Click True if this is something you should do in a meeting, or False if it is something you don't do in a meeting.

4.2.8 Example 4 answer

Don't talk about your issue from a global or national perspective, at least for anything longer than a brief mention. Instead, DO talk about the implications and issues for your state and district. Members of Congress are focused on their voters and geographic area so it is more productive for you to stay within those areas for your meetings.

4.2.9 Transition

In the next section, you will learn more about how to structure messages for engagements with champions and less receptive audiences.

4.3 Communicating climate messages

4.3.1 Climate change communication

Advocating for climate change with policymakers is a highly sensitive topic and as such requires a bit more strategy than just planning for a meeting. This section will provide strategies for talking with policymakers that are natural allies and with policymakers that do not agree with you.

4.3.2 Engaging with climate change ‘champions’

When engaging with so-called champions, it’s helpful to consider identifying problems or challenges they are encountering and discuss practical solutions. Below are some talking points that can get you started:

- Thank you for your tireless work on climate change!
- I appreciate your office’s previous support of “xyz” legislation.
- What is your office concerned about at the moment with respect to climate change?
- What resources can I provide to you?
- Do you need experts to speak to the facts of issues you are championing?

Being a scientist or having certain expertise in climate topics can bring expert credibility to their stance on climate issues and can potentially benefit everyone in the conversation.

4.3.3 Engaging with less receptive audiences

Engaging with opponents to climate change or less receptive audiences requires a bit more planning. Below are some strategies and tips.

- First, research and understand your policymaker’s values such as patriotism, and connect them with your climate change policy and legislation goals.
- Second, **find out their concerns**. Do some searching to figure out any concerns of theirs that could be related and connected to your topic of interest.
- Third, stay local when discussing climate change issues. Discuss a concern related to your district or state. For example, if you are from a coastal community, you could be worried about hurricanes, so start there.
- Fourth, connect your climate change legislation or issues of interest to topics they care about. For example: “I know you are concerned about X topic, consider supporting Y bill, which could provide a solution.”
- Finally, emphasize potential benefits. Identify and discuss benefits to that district or state from climate change action, such as new jobs in renewable energy production.

4.3.4 Scenarios

The next few slides will go through a few scenarios. They are not comprehensive, but will give you an idea about potential messaging you could use to find common ground and gain your Congressperson’s support for legislation or other actions that could help to directly or indirectly combat climate change.

4.3.5 Scenario 1: Wildfires

For the first scenario, you have a concern about the severity of wildfires in your state that have become more severe in recent years. Your Congressperson does not have a particular interest in discussing climate change. In this instance, you will likely not be able to advance your issue by speaking to climate change and its connection to wildfires. Instead, here are alternative topics to focus on so that you can take action while still addressing the impacts on society from severe wildfires:

- power outages and power grid damage and disruptions;
- home and business property loss;
- economic repercussions like crop destruction and soil quality deterioration; and
- rising insurance costs.

4.3.6 Scenario 2: U.S. national debt

Pretend you are a constituent of a Congressperson who is focused on the rising U.S. national debt. How do you approach them about climate change issues? The next slide will walk you through one example of how to discuss funding for climate change action when the national debt is a major concern and when they do not typically take action on climate issues.

4.3.7 Scenario 2 response

From previous sections, you know that climate change will cause increased severity of storms and natural disasters. One approach is to frame climate change concerns around money and costs. Here is one example:

Investing pre-emptively in natural disaster preparation will save money, time, and community health in the long run. From 1980 to 2021, there were 310 weather or climate events with more than \$1 billion dollars in losses that in total exceeded \$2 trillion dollars in damages. From 1980 to 2021, there were an average of 7.4 of these events per year, but the annual average for 2017 to 2021 is 17.2 events. Note these numbers are Consumer Price Index-adjusted.

So, while policy and legislative action by the United States would mean investing more funds now to support climate change action, it will be far less than if investments do not happen at every level to combat climate change or compared to ongoing costs from disaster recovery.

4.3.8 Scenario 3: U.S. national security

Pretend you are a constituent of a Congressperson who is focused on U.S. national security. How do you approach them about climate change issues? The next slide will walk you through one example of how to discuss funding for climate action when national security is a major concern or talking point, and they do not typically take action on climate issues. Turns out, the Pentagon is already thinking about the intersection of climate change and national security.

4.3.9 Scenario 3 response

The Pentagon Climate Risk Analysis states: "Climate change is reshaping the geostrategic, operational, and tactical environments with significant implications for U.S. national security and defense." You can access the Pentagon Climate Risk Analysis by clicking on the resource icon at the bottom right.

For a Congressperson focused on U.S. national security, you could focus your climate change messaging on one of the following topics:

- Rising sea levels and coastline issues -- both generally and their specific threat to coastal military bases.

- Impacts to food and clean water availability. For example, seawater intrusion into fresh drinking water sources or agricultural fields can be a major problem thanks to sea level rise.
- The instability of electrical grids due to more severe storms, floods, and other natural disasters.

4.3.10 Scenario 4: American competitiveness

Pretend you are a constituent of a Congressperson who is focused on improving American competitiveness on the global stage. How do you approach them about climate change issues? The next slide will walk you through one example of how to discuss funding for climate action with your Congressperson when American competitiveness is a major concern or talking point.

4.3.11 Scenario 4 response

If American competitiveness is a concern for your Congressperson, you might find common ground talking about one or more of the following topics.

- First, research and development. Specifically, you could discuss how investments in R&D and improvements in American-invented and -made technologies can make the United States more competitive.
- Second, STEM education. You can discuss the importance of making sure kids receive great education in STEM, which will help create a stronger American workforce.
- Third, infrastructure investments. Upgrading to the latest energy-efficient technology, updating stormwater and water treatment systems, and repairing existing infrastructure will help cities to be more prepared as climate change disasters happen.
- Fourth, U.S. energy independence. Not having to rely on another country for fuel is key to American competitiveness, and renewable energy technologies will get the United States there.
- Lastly, U.S. economic growth and job creation. Investing in innovative companies focused on combating climate change not only helps to counter the harmful impacts, but it also stimulates economic growth and job creation.

4.3.12 Transition

In the next section, you will learn about alternative audiences to consider beyond Washington, D.C. policymakers.

4.4 Thinking outside of D.C.

4.4.1 Thinking outside of Washington, D.C.

While it's great to be an advocate for climate change by interacting with your federal policymakers, you can also have a big impact at the state and local level. State level works similarly to the Federal government, containing an executive and legislative body and Senators and Representatives that you can contact. Representatives at the state level can also be known as Assemblypersons or Delegates. State legislators know a lot about your local area, so you can be specific about concerns or things you would like to see happen. Similar to the national level, you

can ask them to cosponsor state-level legislation or to support an issue. For example, your issue could be something about the intersection of STEM education and climate change.

At a local level, you have a city council, mayor, parks and recreation department, city manager, school board, and more. Similarly, you can bring up topics or projects that help your local community prevent, prepare, and be more resilient for climate change impacts.

While ACS focuses solely on Federal advocacy efforts, you, as a private citizen, can engage at all levels.

4.4.2 City climate change plans

One way to learn more about your city's challenges and activities with respect to climate change is by searching for their mitigation plans. Two examples are listed here. The icon on the bottom right provides you with a list and link to many city climate action plans.

This resource provides an excellent way to initially engage with your city officials. If you don't see a climate action plan for your city, you can ask your city to create their own climate change mitigation plan or use other city action plans as inspiration for specific issues. If there is one for your city, you can ask your city officials to take action based on parts of your city's plan.

The image on the right is the front cover for New York City's Climate Action Plan.

4.4.3 Local level

In addition to climate change mitigation plans, cities have control over many aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation. The EPA has resources for planning climate change adaptation, including local government and community resources. To learn more, click on the resource icon at the bottom right that will take you to the EPA page.

4.4.4a Indigenous Nations Climate Action Plans

Many Indigenous Nations have assembled climate adaptation plans – these are only a few. Click on the resource icons below each cover image to explore their plans.

4.4.5 Transition

In the next section, you will see a summary of the workshop's takeaways and more importantly how to continue your advocacy beyond this course.