



Easy Read Edition

They Work For Us: **A Self-Advocate's Guide to** **Getting Through to your** **Elected Officials**

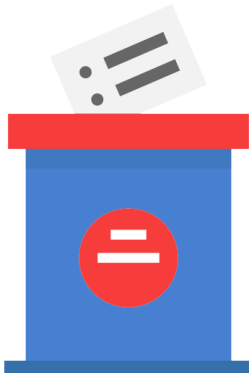
Part 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

What is this toolkit?



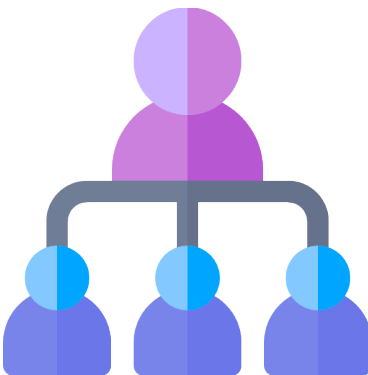
This toolkit is about how to talk to the people who represent us in the government.



Everyday people like you and me **elect** (vote for), the people who represent us in government.



Politicians who are elected are called **elected officials**.



The President, your Senators, and your Mayor are all elected officials.

This toolkit will explain:



1. The different levels of government



2. What our elected officials do



3. The best ways to talk to your elected officials



4. How to vote for who you want to represent you in the government

Why is this toolkit important?



Elected officials listen to the problems that people have.



Then, they make **laws** to fix these problems. Laws are rules the government makes that everyone has to follow.



Laws affect people with disabilities.



When elected officials make a law, they think about what people want and need.



We have to make sure that our elected officials hear about what people with disabilities want and need. Then, the laws they make will work better for us.



This is why it is important to talk to our elected officials.



Voting for people whose ideas you like is another way to change what the government does.

How can I use this toolkit?



You can read this toolkit from beginning to end, or go straight to the parts that you want to know more about.

Glossary



You'll see some words in this guide that are **bolded**. We explain these words in the Glossary at the end of each section.

There is also a Glossary at the end of the toolkit with all of these words.



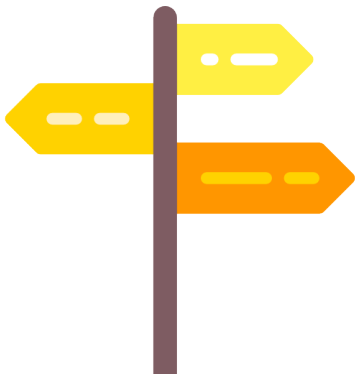
Scripts and examples

When we tell you how to do something, we will use scripts and examples to show you how it works.



Scripts

Scripts are words you can use. In this toolkit, we give you scripts in case you need help thinking of what words you can use. Scripts will be set apart from the rest of the text in a rounded rectangle.



Here is an example of a script for asking directions to the library.

"Hello, do you know where the library is?"



In our scripts, there are some places where you have to add in your own words. When you need to add in your own words, we have made those places **[bold and in brackets]**. Here is an example:

You: My name is **[your full name]**, and I live at **[address]**.



Someone using this script might say this: "My name is Sally Jones, and I live at 123 Community Lane." You can change the name and address to be your name and your address.

Sometimes, a script might give you choices, like this:

You: I'm calling to ask the **[Senator / Representative]** to vote **[yes / no]** on this bill.



In a script like this, you choose which option makes the most sense. So if you want to call your Senator to tell them to vote no, you would say "I'm calling to ask the Senator to vote no on this bill."



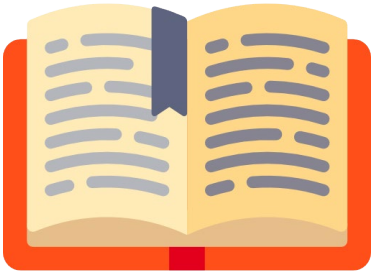
Examples

This toolkit uses examples to show how things work in real life. To make it clearer, examples will look like this:

For example, ASAN published a toolkit called They Work For Us. The toolkit uses an Easy Read format with large text and plain language.

ASAN designed this toolkit so that any person with any disability can use it and learn from it.

Meet Sally Jones



When we are explaining a way to talk to your elected officials, we will give an example of how it might work. We made up a story to use in these examples. We want to tell you more about that story now.



In our examples, we will talk about Sally Jones. Sally lives in Normaltown, California.



There is a big problem in Sally's town and in towns all over the United States. Swarms of angry bees are showing up everywhere. Sally wants her elected official to do something about the bees.

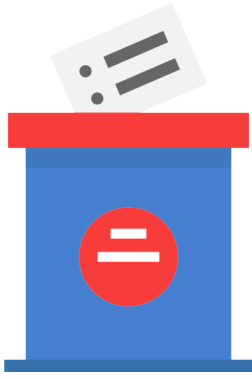


Sally, Normaltown, and the swarms of angry bees are not real. We made them up.



But the things that Sally does in our examples are things you can do in real life!

Glossary



elect

When we “elect” somebody, we vote for that person to become a part of the government.



elected officials

Politicians that we elect to the government are our elected officials. Elected officials listen to the problems that people have. Then, they make laws to fix these problems.



laws

Laws are rules the government makes that everyone has to follow.

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Part 2: Who Has the Power to **Make Laws?**

2. Who has the power to make laws?



There are two main types of **laws** that affect us:

1. Federal laws

2. State laws



Federal laws are laws for the whole United States.



For example, it is a federal law that all kids get to go to school.



State laws are laws only for people who live or work in a specific state.



For example, in California, students with disabilities can stay in school until they are 22.



In Montana, students with disabilities can only stay in school until they are 19.



The law in Montana doesn't change how long students with disabilities in California can stay in school.

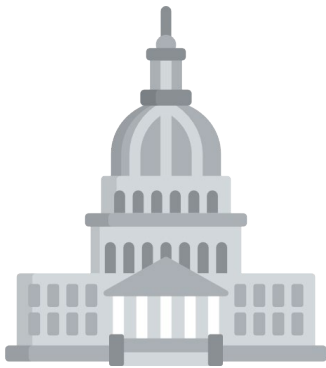
Federal government



The **federal government** is in charge of the whole country.



The federal government makes federal laws.



The part of the federal government that makes laws is called **Congress**.



The people who have the power to make federal laws are **members of Congress**. We **elect** our members of Congress.



There are two different parts of Congress.
These two parts are called:

1. The **Senate**

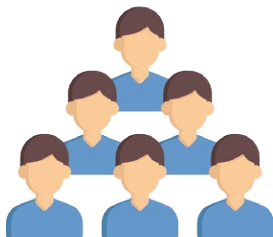


2. The **House of Representatives.**

U.S. Senate



The elected officials in the Senate are
called **Senators.**

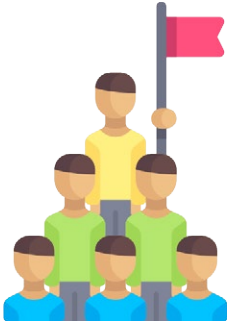


There are 100 Senators in the U.S. Senate.
There are two Senators for each state.

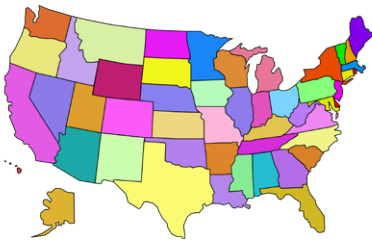
U.S. House of Representatives



The elected officials in the House of Representatives are called **Representatives**.



There are 435 Representatives.



Every state has a different number of Representatives, based on how many people live in the state.



For example, there are about 39 million people who live in California. That's a lot of people, so California has 53 Representatives.



There are only about 1 million people who live in Montana. That's not a lot of people, so Montana only has 1 Representative.



Every state gets at least 1 Representative.



Each Representative comes from a different **district**. A district is a part of a state.



Most districts are made up of one town or a few towns that are next to each other.

State governments



State governments are a lot like the federal government. They are smaller than the federal government because they are only for one state, not the whole country.



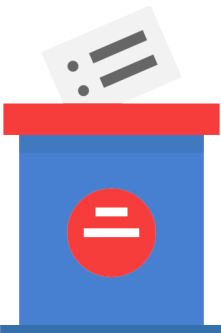
When a state makes a law, it is only a law for people in that state, not the whole country.



Most states have a **State Legislature**. The State Legislature is the part of the state government that makes laws.



Most State Legislatures have two parts, like the U.S. Congress does.



Most states have State Senators and State Representatives to make state laws. We elect our State Senators and State Representatives.

Local governments



A **local government** is in charge of a smaller part of a state, like a city or a county.



Local governments can be very different depending on how many people live in a place or how big the place is.



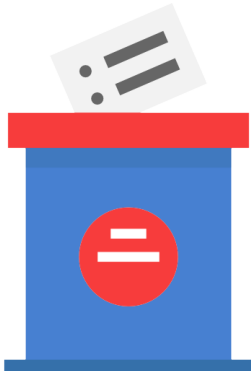
There are a lot of different cities and counties in the U.S, which means there are a lot of local governments in the U.S. They are all very different.



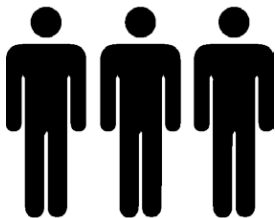
Local governments make **local laws**.



When a local government makes a law, it is only a law for people in that small area, not people in the whole state or the whole country.



Usually, we elect the people who make local laws.



The part of your local government that makes local laws might be called a City Council, a County Board, Aldermen, Selectmen, or something else.



Since local governments are so different from each other, it is hard for us to tell you a lot about your specific local government. But, since your local government is right where you live, you can learn about it on your own.



If you want to learn more about your local government, you can go to your local government building and ask for information. The building might be called a City Hall or a Town Hall.

Federal laws, state laws, and local laws



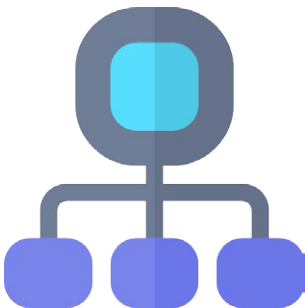
Federal laws are laws for the whole United States.



State laws are laws just for people in a certain state.



Local laws are laws just for people in a certain local area.



People have to follow their local laws, state laws, and federal laws all at the same time. So those laws have to work together.



For example, Sally is in Normaltown, California, in the United States. Sally has to follow the local laws in Normaltown, the state laws in California, *and* the federal laws for the whole United States.



States can't make laws that go against federal laws.



For example, all kids get to go to school. This is a federal law.



A state *can* make a law saying that students with disabilities can go to school until they are 19, until they are 22, or some other age.



A state *can't* make a law saying that kids don't get to go to school. That would go against the federal law.



Local governments can't make laws that go against federal laws *or* the laws in their state.



For example, all kids get to go to school. This is a federal law.



In California, students with disabilities can stay in school until they are 22. This is a state law.



Normaltown, CA *can't* make a law saying that kids don't get to go to school. That would go against the federal law.

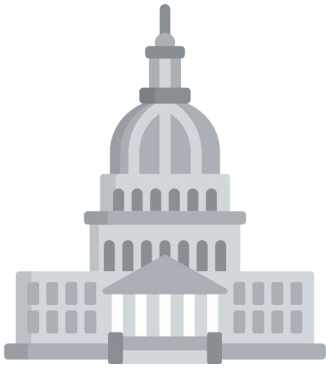


Normaltown, CA *can't* make a law saying that students with disabilities have to stop going to school when they are 20. That doesn't go against the federal law, but it still goes against the state law.



Normaltown, CA *can* make a law saying that students with disabilities can go to school until they are 25. That doesn't go against the state law or the federal law.

Glossary



Congress

The part of the federal government that makes laws.



district

States are split up into different districts. Each Representative in the House of Representatives comes from a different district.



elect

When we “elect” somebody, we vote for that person to become a part of the government.



federal government

The government that is in charge of the entire country and is based in Washington, D.C. The federal government makes federal laws.



federal laws

Federal laws are laws for the whole United States.



House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is one of the two parts of Congress. There are 435 Representatives in the House of Representatives. Every state has a different number of Representatives, based on how many people live in the state.



local government

A local government is in charge of a smaller part of a state, like a city or a county.



local laws

Local governments make local laws. Local laws are just for people in that small area, not people in the whole state or the whole country.



members of Congress

Members of Congress are the people who have the power to make federal laws. We elect our members of Congress.



Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.



Senate

The Senate is one of the two parts of Congress. There are 100 Senators in the U.S. Senate. There are two Senators for each state.



Senators

Senators are the elected officials in the Senate.



state laws

State laws are laws only for people who live or work in a specific state.



State Legislature

The State Legislature is the part of the state government that makes laws. Most State Legislatures have two parts, like the U.S. Congress does.

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Part 3: How Can I Talk to My Elected Officials?

3. How can I talk to my elected officials?



U.S. Senators

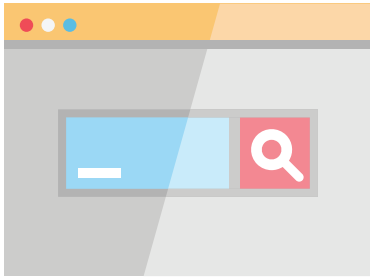
You can find **contact information** (like emails and phone numbers) for your **Senators** [here](#). Click on your state. This will bring up the names of the 2 Senators from your state.



U.S. Representative

You can find contact information for your **Representative** [here](#). Type in your zip code on this page. This will bring up the name of the Representative from your district.

State and local government



The Humane Society has a tool you can use to find out who represents you in **local** and **state government**. All you need to do is enter your address or zip code. Then, the tool will tell you the names and **contact information** of your **elected officials**. [Click here to visit the Humane Society's tool.](#)



You can use these websites to find:

- phone numbers to call



- where to send letters



- where to send emails.

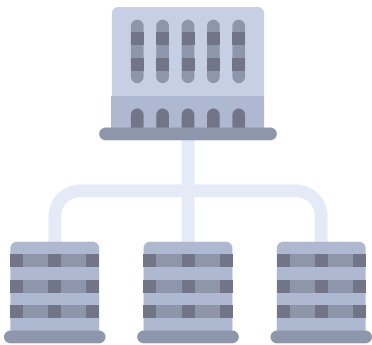


You can also call or send an email to make an appointment to meet in person with your elected official.

Where offices are



Members of Congress (your Representative and your Senators) have more than one office.



Each Member of Congress has one national office in Washington, D.C. They also have one or more offices in the state they are from.



State representatives might have more than one office in their state.

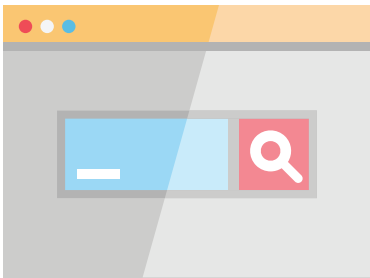


Local representatives, like a City Councilmember, usually have just one office.

Social media



Your elected officials probably have their own pages on **social media** websites (like Facebook or Twitter).



Use the searchbar on these websites to enter their name and find out.

How can I tell my elected officials what I am thinking?

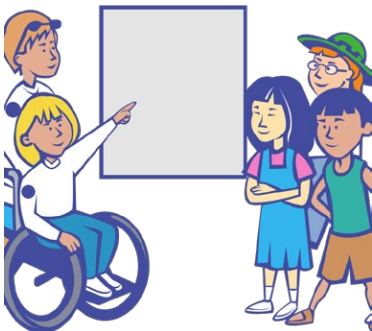


There are lots of different ways that you can get in touch with your elected officials. Some of these ways make a bigger difference than others.

When you talk to your elected officials, there are 2 things that make them listen to you:



1. How personal it is



2. How many people can do it

Here is a list of ways to talk to your elected officials. We put this list in order of how big a difference something can make.



1. Phone calls.

Phone calls can make a big difference if a lot of people call. Phone calls are personal, and lots of people can make phone calls.



2. Visiting your elected officials in person.

Visiting your elected officials makes a big difference. It is personal, but is hard for a lot of people to do at once.



3. Emails and writing letters.

Emails and letters are not as good as phone calls, but they are still important. Elected officials' staff do not pay as much attention to emails and letters as they do to phone calls. Also, it can be harder to make a letter seem personal.



4. Social media (Facebook and Twitter).

You can use social media to put together a group of people to make phone calls or send emails about a problem.

The next few sections will explain more about how to do all of these things.

Glossary



contact information

The information you need to get in touch with your elected officials. Contact information includes email addresses, phone numbers, and office addresses.



elected officials

Politicians that we elect to the government are our elected officials. Elected officials listen to the problems that people have. Then, they make laws to fix these problems.



local government

A local government is in charge of a smaller part of a state, like a city or a county.



local laws

Local governments make local laws. Local laws are just for people in that small area, not people in the whole state or the whole country.



members of Congress

Members of Congress are the people who have the power to make federal laws.



Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.



Senators

Senators are the elected officials in the Senate.



social media

Social media is any place online where people can interact with each other. Some examples are Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.



state laws

State laws are laws only for people who live or work in a specific state.

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Part 4: Making a Phone Call

4. Making a phone call

Why are phone calls important?



The best way to talk to your elected officials is by phone.



Phone calls work better than letters or email.



This is because the person on the phone has to listen to what you have to say. They can put down a letter, but it's rude to hang up on you when you call.



Getting *a lot* of people to call at the same time works very well.



When a government office gets lots of calls, it is hard for people in that office to do anything except answer calls.

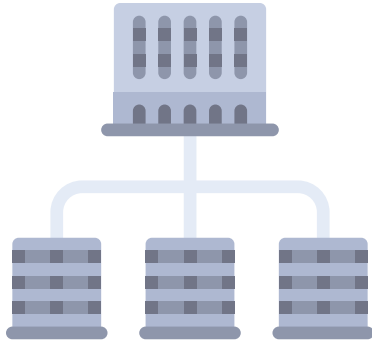


This is good. It means they are spending a lot of time thinking about the phone calls.



Elected officials keep track of how many people call about each problem. So if a lot of people call about one problem, their elected official will think more about that problem.

What should I know before I make a phone call?



Remember that members of Congress have national offices *and* district offices. And members of State Legislatures might have more than one office.



If you're trying to call an elected official who has more than one office, the best thing to do is call *all* their offices.



If you can only call one office, that is also okay. Call the district office that is the closest to where you live.



The person you talk to will not be your elected official. Instead, it will be someone who works for them. This person's job is to let the elected official know what you said.



Before you call, it is a good idea to get a script ready so you know what you want to say.

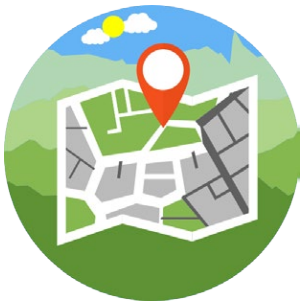


You should talk about your personal experiences. That will show why the problem you are calling about is important to you.

What will happen when I make a phone call?



Keep your call short. That way, the person you are talking to understands the main point of what you are saying.



The person you are talking to might ask if you are a **constituent**. This means that you live in the area that your elected official represents.



Since you will be calling one of your own elected officials, you should say, "Yes, I am a constituent."



Elected officials care the most about the calls coming from people who can vote for them. So you shouldn't call any elected officials who don't represent your area. To make it easier for the person you are talking to, say where you live at the beginning of the call.



The person you are talking to might also ask if you would like your elected official to respond to your call. This means that your elected official will send you a letter after your call. It is your choice how you want to answer this question.



If you want to talk about a specific law, it is important to include the name of that law in your message.

Script for calling your elected official about a law



You:

Hello, I would like to say something to **[elected official's name]** about **[problem or issue]**.



Staff member:

Certainly. Please go ahead.



You:

Thank you. My name is **[your full name]**, and I live at **[address]**. I'm calling to ask **[elected official's name]** to support laws that **[fix the problem you are calling about - explain that here]**. I care about this because **[reason]**.



Staff member:

I will give your message to **[elected official's name]**. Would you like them to send a response to you?



You:

[Yes/No]. Thank you for your time,
goodbye.



Staff member:

Thank you for your call. Have a good
day.

Example: Calling Representative Smith



Sally Jones is from Normaltown, California.



In her town and in towns all over the United States, swarms of angry bees are showing up everywhere. The bees are attacking people and making people feel afraid to go outside.



It is also costing people and the government a lot of money to pay for health care for people who get hurt by the bees.



Sally is part of the Stop the Bees Community Group. The group tells elected officials about the bee problem.



Recently, Congress introduced a bill called the Beekeeping Act. If this bill passed and became a law, the government would give money to help the bees move away from the cities and towns.



Sally wants to talk with her U.S. Representative, Anne Smith, to ask her to support the Beekeeping Act.

Here is what Sally might say if she called Representative Smith's office on the phone:



Sally:

Hello, I would like to say something to Representative Smith about the Beekeeping Act.



Smith's staff member:

Okay, go ahead.



Sally:

Thank you. My name is Sally Jones, and I live at 123 Community Lane in Normaltown, CA. I'm calling to ask Representative Smith to support the Beekeeping Act. I care about this because lots of people in my town have been attacked by bees, and it is making us all afraid to go outside.

The Beekeeping Act would give the bees somewhere else to go so they would leave our town, and then we could all be safe again.



Staff member:

I will give your message to Representative Smith. Would you like her to send a response to you?



Sally:

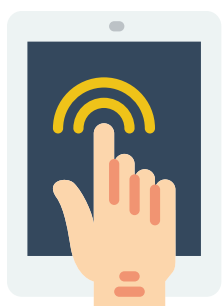
Yes. Thank you for your time, goodbye.



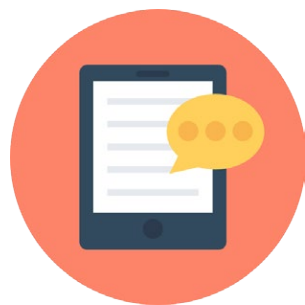
Staff member:

Thank you for your comments. Have a good day.

What if I can't talk on the phone?



You can use an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device, like an iPad, to type out what you want to say.



Then, use text-to-speech to have your text read out loud while you are on the phone.



It is important to say first that you are a person who is using AAC. If you don't say that first, they might hang up on you.



You don't have to wait for the staff member to respond to you if you want to have your whole comment read aloud at once.



If the staff member has questions for you after you make your speech, you can let them know you need some time to answer.

Example: Script for calling with an AAC device

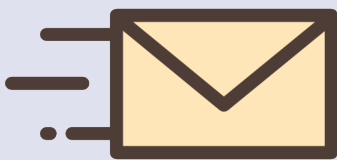
Here is a sample AAC script:



Hello, I am a real constituent who is using a text-to-speech device because of a disability. I would like to say something to **[elected official's name]** about **[issue]**. My name is **[your full name]**, and I live at **[full address]**.



I'm calling to ask **[elected official's name]** to support laws that **[fix the problem you are calling about - explain that here]**. I care about this because **[reason]**.



I **[would like/would not like]** a response from **[elected official's name]**. If you need more information, please let me know and give me a little time to type the answer. Thank you.



Another option for AAC users is to use the script for non-AAC phone calls to type out an answer for each part of the call, then hit each part in the right order to talk with the person on the phone.



You can also write out your script and have someone else read it for you over the phone. All they have to do is tell your elected official at the beginning of the call that they are speaking for you. They can say:

Hi, my name is **[their name]** and I am calling on behalf of **[your name]**. **[Your name]** can't use the phone because of a disability.



Some people are making local groups to volunteer to make calls for people who can't speak. Try checking social media to see if there is a group like this near you, or make one of your own!

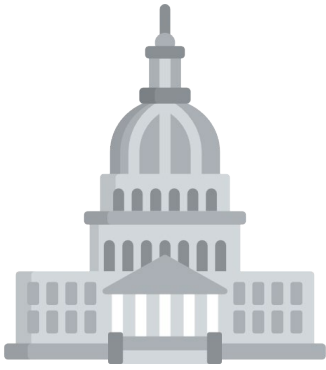


If talking on the phone makes you nervous, you can also call your elected official after their office is closed. Offices are usually closed after 5 p.m., or on the weekends.



If you call an office that is closed, you will get an answering machine to leave a message instead of having to talk to a person. Elected officials and their staff members do listen to phone messages, so this makes a difference.

Glossary



Congress

The part of the federal government that makes laws.



constituent

If you're a constituent of an elected official, that means that you live in the area that the elected official represents.



elected officials

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Part 5: Meeting in Person

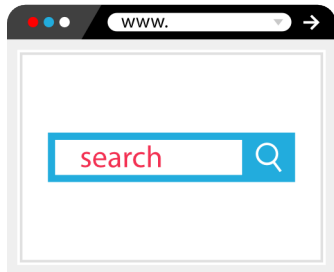


5. Meeting in person

Face-to-face meetings are very important. **Elected officials** can't ignore people who are right in front of them talking about a problem.



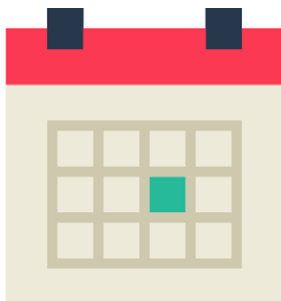
Meetings help elected officials put a “face” to a certain **bill** or **law**. Your elected official might think about you and your story when they are deciding whether to support a law. This could affect their decision about the law.



You can find out how to set up a meeting with an elected official on their website.



Some elected officials have a page on their website for setting up meetings. But, for most elected officials, you will need to call or email them.



You should plan to set up your meeting at least 2 weeks before you want to meet.

What should I expect at a meeting?

Here are some tips for what to expect at a meeting, and how you can prepare:



- Meetings are usually about 15 to 45 minutes long. Try to find out how long a meeting will be so you can plan how much to say.



- You probably won't meet with your elected official. Instead, you will meet with someone who works for your elected official. After the meeting, they will tell the elected official what you said.



- Learn everything you can about the law or problem you are talking about before the meeting. Also learn about what other people might say to argue against your opinion.



- If you have any handouts, charts or pictures that will help you explain your opinion, bring a few copies with you. You can give them to the people you're talking to and have one for yourself to look at.



- Arrive at the meeting place about 10 minutes before the appointment time.



- Try to dress nicely.

Elevator speeches



You might want to come up with an **elevator speech** before you meet with your elected official.



An elevator speech is a short speech that you have memorized in case you get a moment with an elected official. For example, riding the elevator with them.

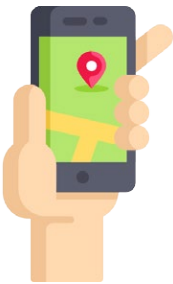


Elevator speeches help you remember your most important points. They're also good scripts to use if your meeting is very short.

Here is what you should put in an elevator speech:

HELLO
my name is

- Your first and last name



- Where you live



- Your school, workplace, or another group you belong to



- Bring up the law or problem you want to talk about. Explain what you want.



- Say *why* you and other people care about this.



- Thank the elected official for listening to you



Try to keep your elevator speech under 1 minute long. Make sure to practice your speech before your meeting.



You might want to bring a piece of paper with some information you would like to share. You can give the paper to your elected official or their staff, so they can read it and learn more later.

Example: Elevator speech

Here is an example of an elevator speech Sally might give to her **Representative**:



Hi, I'm Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown, California. I'm a member of the Stop the Bees Community Group.



I'm here today to ask you to support the Beekeeping Act. The Beekeeping Act will give money to build the bees homes away from our city.



Right now, there are too many bees everywhere. I was scared to leave my house to come here and meet you. Everyone I've talked to feels scared because of the bees.



If we pass the Beekeeping Act, we won't have to feel scared to leave our houses anymore.



Please support the Beekeeping Act to give us our safety back. Thank you for your time.

What should I do during a meeting?



- Introduce yourself to the person you are meeting with. Tell them who you are and where you live.



- Try to start by saying good things about something your elected official has done recently. This helps make the person you're talking to more open to your ideas.



- Bring up the law or problem you want to talk about. Explain what you want.



- Say *why* you and other people care about this.



- Be ready to answer questions and give the people you're talking to more information.

Other things to keep in mind:



- The person you are talking to might disagree with what you have to say. This can be frustrating.



- Remember that your goal is to get them to change their mind. So, make sure that you don't yell or make it seem like you are arguing with them. If you do this, they might not listen to what you are saying.



- Always try to end the conversation on a positive note.



- After a meeting, always send a thank-you email. This lets your elected official know that you appreciate their time. It also helps them remember what you talked about.

Example: Meeting with Representative Smith

Let's say that Sally goes to visit Representative Smith, to talk about the bee problem. Here is an example of a good meeting between Sally and Representative Smith:



Sally:

Hello, Representative Smith. My name is Sally Jones, and I'm from Normaltown.



Representative Smith:

Great to meet you, Sally.



Sally:

It's great to meet you as well. I want to start by telling you how much I like your bill, the Free Cereal for Everyone Act. It has helped my family have breakfast food.



Representative Smith:

Thank you. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.



Sally:

I wanted to talk with you about the Beekeeping Act. Do you know about this bill?



Representative Smith:

I have heard about it, but please remind me.



Sally:

The Beekeeping Act would put money towards building a new place where the bees can live.

I'm sure you know that there are bees all over town. This scares people. I have a list of names for you of more than 500 community members who say that they feel scared to go outside because of the bees. Last week, the bees attacked my nephew. We need to build another place for the bees to live.



Representative Smith:

I agree that it's bad when bees attack people. But the bees also give us important things, like honey. I'm not sure I can support a law that would make all the bees leave.



Sally:

Yes, honey is important. But the government is spending a lot of money right now to pay for health care for people who get stung by bees.

Building the bees a new place to live will save all that money. Then we can use that money to buy honey.



Representative Smith:

What if we build the bees a place to live, and then the bees don't want to move there?



Sally:

I have talked with many expert beekeepers. They told me that if we build the bees homes, the bees will definitely use them. Here is a letter from the beekeepers that explains what they have to say.



Representative Smith:

Hmm. That is a good point. I will think more about this.



Sally:

Thank you for your time today. Please consider supporting the Beekeeping Act.

Glossary



bill

A bill is an idea for a law. It is not yet a law and it can be changed. Congress votes on bills. Then, those bills become laws.



elected officials

Politicians that we elect to the government are our elected officials. Elected officials listen to the problems that people have. Then, they make laws to fix these problems.



laws

Laws are rules the government makes that everyone has to follow.



Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.

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Easy Read Edition

They Work For Us:

A Self-Advocate's Guide to Getting Through to your Elected Officials

Part 6: Letter Writing & Emails

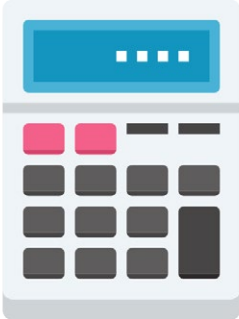
6. Letter writing & emails



You can email your **elected officials**, or write them a letter.



The people who read the emails and letters for elected officials usually don't read the whole thing. Instead, they look quickly to find out what law the email or letter is about. But it is still good to send emails or letters.

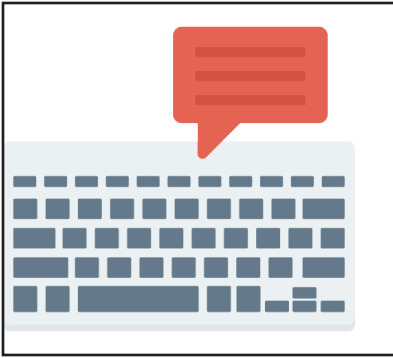


Elected officials keep track of how many letters or emails they get about a problem. So, if a lot of people write to them about a specific problem, it might make them think more about that problem.



It is good to get *a lot* of people to send letters or emails. Getting a lot of letters or emails about a law shows elected officials that people really care about that law.

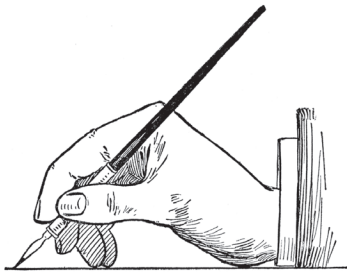
Sending emails



You should explain in the email's subject line what you want your elected official to do.

For example, Sally might send an email with the subject line **Please Support the Beekeeping Act, H.R. 2899.**

Sending letters



Writing a letter is a little more helpful than writing an email. Your elected officials are more likely to notice a bunch of paper letters than a bunch of emails.



A good thing about letters is that they are **postmarked**. This means that the post office puts a mark on the letter to show where it came from.



The postmark on your letter proves that you are a real **constituent** living in your elected official's state or **district**.

Sending Faxes



You can also send letters to your elected officials by **fax**. There is a website called FaxZero that you can use. Here's how it works:



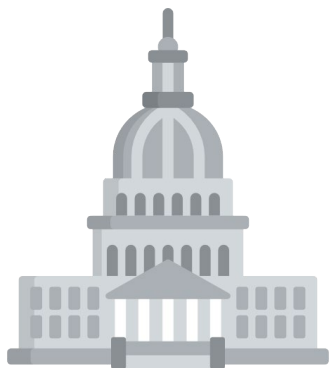
1. You type out what you want to say.



2. FaxZero sends the message to the fax machine of your elected official.



3. Your elected official's fax machine will print out your message as a paper copy.



You can fax any number you want, but there is a special part of FaxZero's website to fax your members of Congress. You can fax your Senators [here](#). You can fax your Representatives from the House of Representatives [here](#).

Script for emails and letters

[Elected official's full name]

[Address]

Dear **[elected official's name]**:

Laws that **[fix a certain problem - explain here]** are very important to me because **[reason]**.

[Use this space to talk more about how the law or policy you are writing about will help people].

I would like to learn more about what you are doing about **[problem]**. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to my **[email/letter]**. I think **[problem]** is an important issue. I would like to make sure that it is fixed by **[how you think it should be fixed - explain here]**.

Sincerely,

[Your full name]

[Address]

[Phone Number]

[Email Address]

Example: Letter to Representative Smith

Representative Anne Smith
1000 Town Center
Normaltown, CA

Dear Representative Smith,

Laws that will control where bees can live are very important to me. Right now, there are so many bees in my town that it is difficult and scary to go outside. The Beekeeping Act will help fix this problem. It will give money towards building the bees a home away from our town. The bees have hurt a lot of my friends and neighbors. Building the bees a new home will help us feel safe again. It will also help save money on health care.

I would like to learn more about what you are doing about the bee swarm problem. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to my email. I think controlling the bees is an important issue. I would like to make sure that it is fixed by giving the bees a place to live that isn't in our towns and cities.

Sincerely,

Sally Jones
123 Community Lane
Normaltown, CA
888-555-0123
sallyjones@stopthebees.com

Glossary



constituent

If you're a constituent of an elected official, that means that you live in the area that the elected official represents.



district

States are split up into different districts. Each Representative in the House of Representatives comes from a different district.



elected officials

Politicians that we elect to the government are our elected officials. Elected officials listen to the problems that people have. Then, they make laws to fix these problems.



fax

A fax combines email and print letters. You send a message to an elected official's fax machine, and the fax machine will print out your message.



postmarked

A postmarked letter has a mark from the post office showing where it came from.

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Easy Read Edition

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Part 7: Social Media

7. Social Media



Social media is any website that you can use to talk to or share ideas with other people.



There are 2 major social media websites that you can use to talk to your elected officials. These websites are Facebook and Twitter.



You can use social media to talk to other people who care about the same problems that you do.



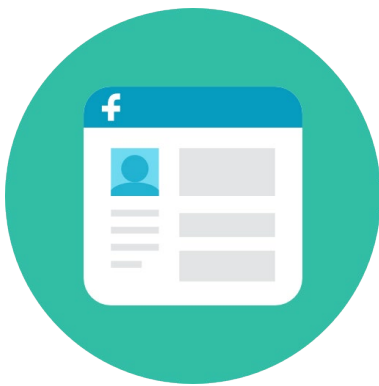
You can also use it to spread the word about problems you care about so that other people can learn about them. Or you can use it to learn about problems you didn't know about before.



Facebook

Personal profiles and friends

More American adults use Facebook than any other website.



On Facebook, you can make a private page for yourself and post whatever you want on it. This is called a **Facebook profile**.



If you have friends who use Facebook, you can add them as a friend. Then, you can see each other's posts and make your own posts on each other's profiles. This helps people stay in touch with people they know, and share things that they care about.



You can also use Facebook to talk with people you don't know in real life. You can do this by creating a Facebook page or group.

Pages



A **Facebook page** is a public profile for a person or group. For example, a famous person might have a Facebook page to let their fans know what they are up to.



If you like a page, you will follow it and see updates from that page. Pages are good for sharing blog posts, articles, events, and news.



Elected officials often have their own Facebook pages. You can like their page to keep up with what they are doing. You can also leave comments on their page, but they usually won't respond to them.

Groups



Facebook groups are places where people can talk to each other about things they are interested in.

There are three different privacy settings for groups:

1. Secret
2. Closed
3. Public



Secret means no one can find the group unless they are invited to join.



Closed means anyone can find the group and see its members, but no one can see posts in the group unless they are invited.

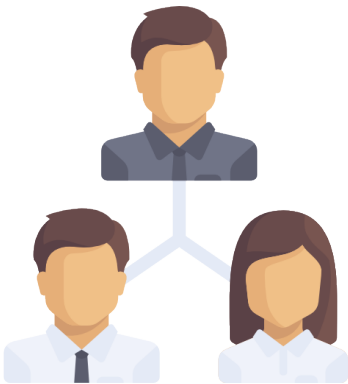


Public means that anyone can find the group, see the group's members, and see the posts in the group.

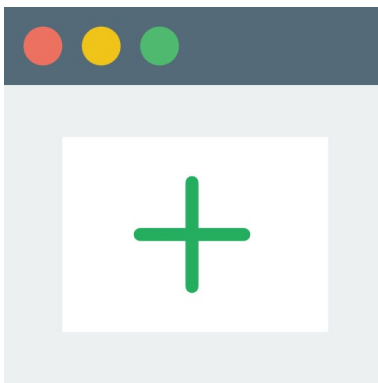
Why use Facebook?



There are a lot of ways you can use Facebook to get involved in advocacy.



You can tell people about topics that are important to you on your Facebook profile, or in a Facebook group. Facebook groups and pages let you reach a lot of people quickly.



You can create a page if you are a part of an advocacy group. You can use the group to let people know what you are doing and give them chances to get involved.



You can also follow pages or join groups for other organizations to learn what they are doing.



Lots of people and pages on Facebook post news about policies and laws. Just by checking Facebook, you can learn more about problems that matter to the people you know.



Facebook is also a great tool to work together with other advocacy groups. That's because it can be easier to send a message on Facebook than to make a phone call or meet up in person.



You can use Facebook to organize group activities. You can get a group of people together to write letters or make phone calls to elected officials.



As we talked about before, elected officials also sometimes have their own Facebook pages. You can post on these pages how you feel about important issues and see what other people in your area think.

Example: Using Facebook to Stop the Bees



Let's say Sally wants to spread the word about the Stop the Bees Community Group. She wants to organize a letter-writing campaign to Representative Smith.



Sally could make a Facebook group for the Stop the Bees Community Group. Then, she could invite her friends and family to join the group.



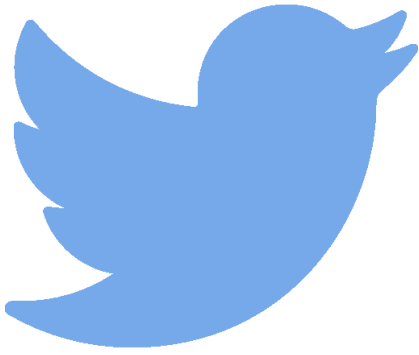
Sally could also post the group on Representative Smith's Facebook page. That way, other people who want to stop the bees could join the group.



Sally could post information in the Facebook group about what people should put in their letters to Representative Smith. That way, the letters people send will be clear about the bee problem and how to fix it.



This helps make sure that Representative Smith understands how important the problem is.



Twitter

Twitter does not have pages or groups like Facebook. Each person on Twitter just gets their own profile.



Tweets

On Twitter, posts are called **tweets**, and posting is called **tweeting**.

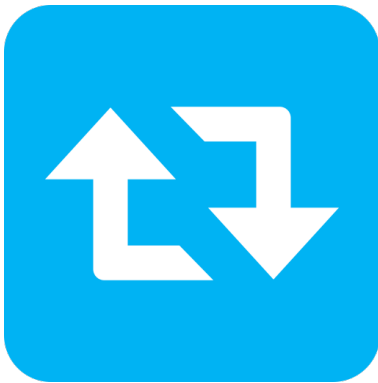


Everything that someone tweets has to be 140 letters or less, which is about 25 words. This can be hard for some people to do. But, it also helps make sure everything people post is short and to-the-point.

Following and re-tweeting



You can follow people on Twitter to see what they are saying.



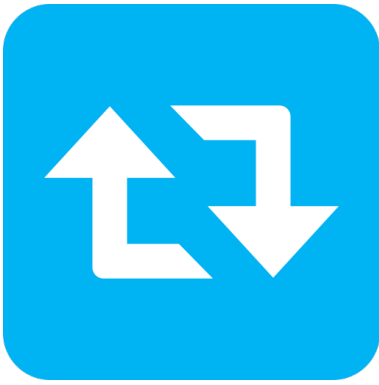
If you want the people that follow you to see a certain tweet from someone else, you can **re-tweet** it. Re-tweeting something makes the tweet show up on your own Twitter page.



Re-tweeting is easy to do. This makes it easy for important tweets to spread around Twitter really quickly.



Many elected officials have a Twitter account. Following them can help you learn about what they are doing.



You can re-tweet things elected officials post to spread the word to other people who care.



#Hashtags

People on Twitter can put something in their tweets called a **hashtag**. Hashtags are a way to let people group tweets into categories.



To use a hashtag, type the hashtag symbol (#). On most US computers, you can do this by pressing the shift key and 3. Then type a word or phrase with no spaces.

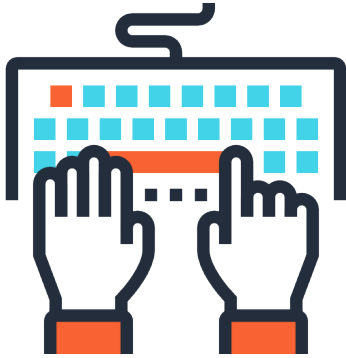


When a lot of people use the same hashtag at once, that hashtag begins **trending**. That means the hashtag will show up on the front page of Twitter, and a lot of people will see it.



@Tagging

You can also tag a person in a Twitter post, which means that they will see the tweet.



To tag someone, type a period (.), then the @ symbol, and enter the Twitter username of the person you want to tag. You can type the @ symbol by pressing the shift key and 2.

Twitterbombs



Hashtags are a big reason why Twitter can be a good tool to get the attention of elected officials.



When people work together to come up with a hashtag and get it trending, it is called a **Twitterbomb**.



Twitterbombs make it so lots of people see tweets with that hashtag. You can use this to help people learn about a problem that they may not have known about before. You can give people ideas for how to solve a problem.



If an elected official has a Twitter, you can organize a Twitterbomb and tag them in all of the tweets. That way, whenever is in charge of their account will definitely notice what you are saying.

Live-tweeting



Another helpful thing that people on Twitter do is **live-tweeting**.



Live-tweeting happens when someone goes to an event. The person posts on Twitter what is going on at the event for people who can't be there.



Live-tweeting can be helpful for things like a town hall with an elected official. This is because not everyone is going to be able to go talk to their elected official.



Live-tweeting helps people learn about what is going on while it is happening.



That way, people can take action for anything that needs to be done quickly after the event is over. For example, organizing a phone call campaign to an elected official.

Example: Using Twitter to #StopTheBees



Let's say Sally decided to use Twitter to show Representative Smith that the bees are a big problem. She organized a Twitterbomb using the hashtag #stopthebees.



People used the hashtag to share their personal stories about how the bees have hurt them.



They tagged the Twitter account of Representative Smith in all of the tweets. That way, Representative Smith and everyone who followed her Twitter would also see them.



Some people who saw the tweets even made their own tweets about the bees afterwards.

Here are some examples of tweets that might use the #stopthebees hashtag:



Sally Jones @StopTheBees · 35s

.@RepAnneSmith I shouldn't be afraid to go outside! 🐝 #stopthebees



Sally Jones @StopTheBees · 3s

.@RepAnneSmith My son had an allergic reaction to being stung last week. He is still in the hospital. 🏥 🐝 We need to #stopthebees! ❌ 🐝



Sally Jones @StopTheBees · 4s

.@RepAnneSmith It isn't fair that only your office is bee-proof. What about all of us? What are you doing to #stopthebees?



Glossary



Closed (Facebook group)

If a Facebook group is “Closed”, anyone can find the group and see its members. But, nobody can see posts in the group unless they are invited.

elected officials



Politicians that we elect to the government are our elected officials. Elected officials listen to the problems that people have. Then, they make laws to fix these problems.

Facebook profile



A private, personal page on the social media site Facebook. You can make posts and add people to be your Facebook friends. Then you can see each other's posts.



Facebook page

A Facebook page is a public profile for a person or group. For example, a famous person might have a Facebook page to let their fans know what they are up to.



Facebook group

Facebook groups are places where people can talk to each other about things they are interested in. You can control who is allowed to see posts in the group.



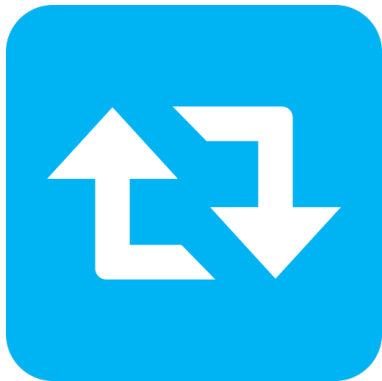
hashtag

Hashtags are a way to group tweets into categories, using the # symbol. For example, #stopthebees.



Public (Facebook group)

If a Facebook group is “Public”, anyone can find the group, see the group’s members, and see the posts in the group.



re-tweet

Re-tweeting something makes the tweet show up on your own Twitter page.



Secret (Facebook group)

If a Facebook group is “Secret”, nobody can find the group unless they are invited to join it.



social media

Social media is any place online where people can interact with each other. Some examples are Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.



trending

When a hashtag on Twitter is trending, that means a lot of people are using that hashtag at the same time. That hashtag will show up on the front page of Twitter.



tweet

A short post made on Twitter. Tweets have to be 140 characters or fewer. “Tweet” can also be used as a verb.



Twitterbomb

An organized effort by many people tweeting using the same hashtag.

Twitterbombs make it so lots of people see tweets with that hashtag.

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Easy Read Edition

They Work For Us:

A Self-Advocate's Guide to Getting Through to your Elected Officials

Part 8: All About Voting

8. All about voting

Why should I vote?

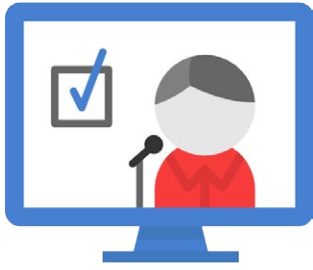


We decide who our elected officials will be by voting in elections.

We vote to decide who gets to be:



- **A member of Congress**
- A State representative
- A State Governor
- The Mayor of a city
- The President of the United States



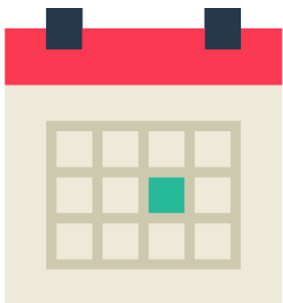
When someone wants to be an elected official, they need to **run for office**. When they run for office, they explain their ideas and ask people to vote for them.



People running for office in an election have different ideas about what the government should do. You might like some of these ideas better than others.

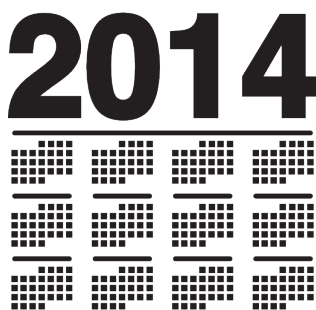


You should vote for someone if you like their ideas the most.



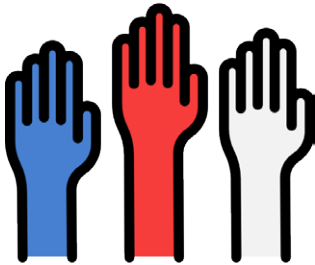
When do I vote?

Elections usually happen at the beginning of November.



Elections for the **state government** or the **federal government** usually happen in years that end in an even number.

For example, the most recent election for **members of Congress** was in 2016, and the next one will be 2018.



Sometimes, there might be “special elections” in other years.

For example, there might be a special election at an unusual time if a politician leaves their job and needs to be replaced.



Some local elections (like for Mayor or City Council) happen in years that end in an odd number.



You can find out when elections will happen by going to [MyTimeToVote.com](https://www.mytimetovote.com).

How often do I need to vote for different elected officials?



Different positions in government have different **terms**. A term is how long someone is allowed to be an elected official before they need to run for office again.

For example:



- A **Senator's** term is 6 years.

A Senator who was elected in 2012 gets to be a Senator until 2018.

To stay a Senator, they need to run in an election in 2018 and get elected again.



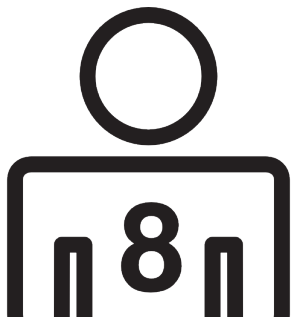
- A **Representative's** term is 2 years.



- The President's term is 4 years.
- Different states have different terms for their Governors and State Legislatures.



Senators and Representatives can have as many terms as they want, as long as people keep electing them.



The President can only have two terms. That means no one can be President for longer than 8 years.

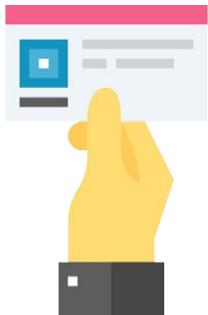


In most states, Governors can only have two terms in a row.

What do I need to do to vote?

1. =
2. =

Different states have different rules about voting.



Some states say that you need to have a photo ID to vote - like a driver's license or state ID card.



In some states, you need to prove that you live in your state before you vote there. If you rent a house or apartment, you can do this by showing a copy of your lease. There are also other ways to prove you live in your state.



Find out about your state's rules by going to [Headcount.org's Voter Info page](https://headcount.org/voter-info) and clicking on your state.

Voting absentee



Sometimes people **vote absentee**. This means voting by mail.



If you vote absentee, you get a **ballot** sent to you in the mail. A ballot is the official form you use to vote.



Once you get the ballot in the mail, you fill it out and send it back.



Some states will let you vote absentee for any reason. Other states only let certain people vote absentee.



Find out about your state's rules by going to [Headcount.org's Voter Info page](https://headcount.org/voter-info) and clicking on your state.

Registering to vote



Before you can vote, you have to get on the list of people who can vote in your state. This is called **registering to vote**.



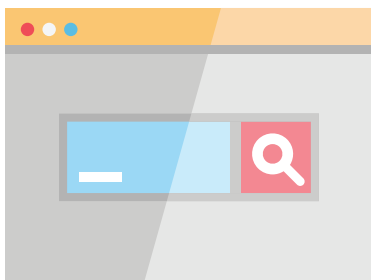
Many states let you register to vote online.



You can also register to vote through the mail by filling out a document called the [National Mail Voter Registration Form](#).



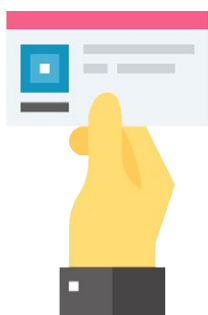
You can register to vote in person by going to a [state or local election office](#).



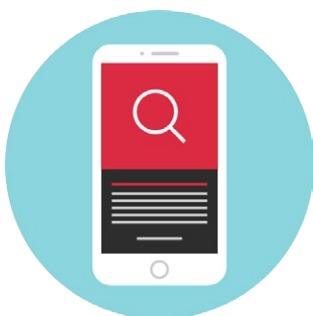
You can find out more about registering to vote in your state by going to [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov).



In most states, you need to register before the election that you want to vote in.



In some states, you can register to vote by going to your polling place in person on the day of an election. If you do this, make sure to bring the things your state needs to register you (like a photo ID or a copy of your lease).



You can find out when you need to register to vote on [RockTheVote.com's](https://www.rockthevote.com) [page about voter registration deadlines](#).

Where is my polling place?



If you vote in an election in person, you have to vote at a specific place. The place where you vote is called your **polling place**.



You can find out where you can go to vote by going to [RockTheVote.com's Find Your Polling Place page](https://RockTheVote.com) and typing in your address. This information might not be updated until a couple of weeks before an election.



Different states have different hours that polling places are open. Check your state's polling hours and make sure that you plan to get to your polling place before it closes.



Sometimes there is a line at the polling place if lots of people are waiting to vote.



As long as you are in line before your polling place closes, you will be allowed to vote, even if the line is long.

What if I have a problem registering to vote or voting?

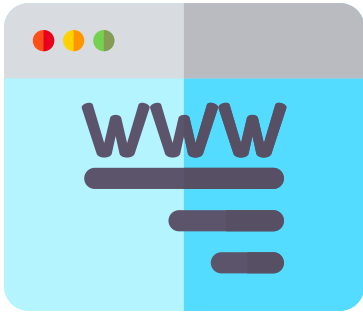


If you have a problem with registering to vote or voting, get in touch with your state's **Protection & Advocacy Agency**.



Protection & Advocacy Agencies are groups that help protect the rights of people with disabilities. There is one in each state. [Click here](#) to find the Protection & Advocacy Agency for your state.

How do I learn more about who to vote for?



People who are running for office usually have their own websites.



You can visit these sites and learn about their ideas. Think about whether their ideas would work to fix problems that are important to you.



Remember that people who are running for office want to say things that will get people to vote for them. They might try to make their ideas sound better than they really are.



Because of this, you should look for more information about people running for office, not just their own website.

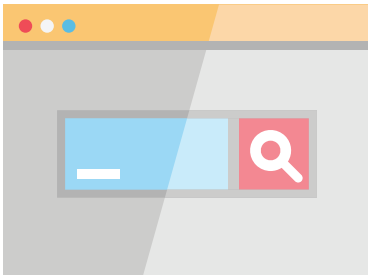


There are other websites to help you find out more about the people running for elected office. Three websites you can use are:

1. [VoteSmart.org](https://www.vote-smart.org)

2. [Ballotpedia.org](https://www.ballotpedia.org)

3. [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org)



You can enter your address on these websites. Then, the site will tell you who the people running for office are. They will also tell you how these people feel about specific issues.



This can help you choose who to vote for.

Glossary



ballot

A ballot is the official form you use to vote.



federal government

The government that is in charge of the entire country and is based in Washington, D.C. The federal government makes federal laws.



members of Congress

Members of Congress are the people who have the power to make federal laws.



Protection & Advocacy Agency

Protection & Advocacy Agencies (or P&As) help protect the rights of people with disabilities. The government funds these organizations.



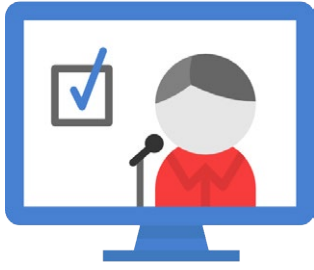
registering to vote

Registering to vote means getting on the list of people who can vote in your state. You have to register to vote before you can vote.



Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.



run for office

When someone wants to be an elected official, they need to run for office. When they run for office, they explain their ideas and ask people to vote for them.



Senators

Senators are the elected officials in the Senate.



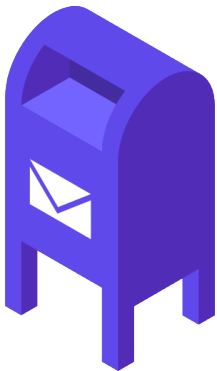
state government

State governments are almost exactly the same as the federal government. State governments are just on a smaller scale. State governments make laws that apply to their states.



term

How long an elected official can serve in government before another election.



vote absentee

Voting absentee means you vote by mail instead of going somewhere to vote.

This publication is supported in part by a cooperative agreement from the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities policy.



Easy Read Edition

They Work For Us:

A Self-Advocate's Guide to Getting Through to your Elected Officials

Part 9: Glossary

Glossary



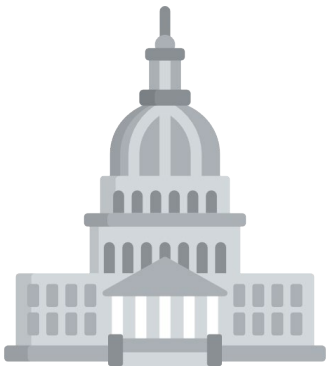
ballot

A ballot is the official form you use to vote.



Closed (Facebook group)

If a Facebook group is “Closed”, anyone can find the group and see its members. But, nobody can see posts in the group unless they are invited.



Congress

The part of the federal government that makes laws.



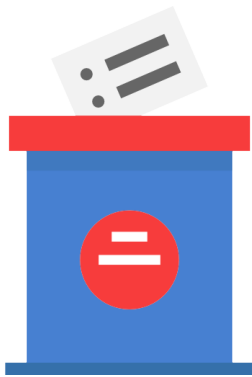
constituent

If you’re a constituent of an elected official, that means that you live in the area that the elected official represents.



district

States are split up into different districts. Each Representative in the House of Representatives comes from a different district.



elect

When we “elect” somebody, we vote for that person to become a part of the government.



elected officials

Politicians that we elect to the government are our elected officials. Elected officials listen to the problems that people have. Then, they make laws to fix these problems.



elevator speech

An elevator speech is a short speech that you have memorized in case you get a moment with an elected official. For example, riding the elevator with them.



Facebook group

Facebook groups are places where people can talk to each other about things they are interested in. You can control who is allowed to see posts in the group.



Facebook page

A Facebook page is a public profile for a person or group. For example, a famous person might have a Facebook page to let their fans know what they are up to.



Facebook profile

A private, personal page on the social media site Facebook. You can make posts and add people to be your Facebook friends. Then you can see each other's posts.



faxing

A way to contact elected officials. You type up a message and send it to the fax number of an elected official. Then, the fax machine in the elected official's office will print out a paper copy of your message.



federal government

The government that is in charge of the entire country and is based in Washington, D.C. The federal government makes federal laws.



federal laws

Federal laws are laws for the whole United States.



hashtag

Hashtags are a way to group tweets into categories, using the # symbol. For example, #stopthebees.



House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is one of the two parts of Congress. There are 435 Representatives in the House of Representatives. Every state has a different number of Representatives, based on how many people live in the state.



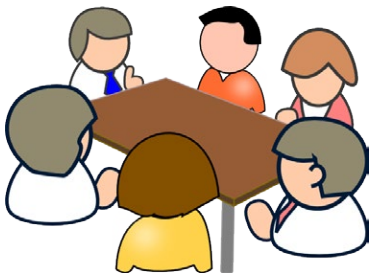
laws

Laws are rules the government makes that everyone has to follow.



live-tweeting

Live-tweeting is when someone goes to an event and posts on Twitter what is going on at the event for people who can't be there.



local government

A local government is in charge of a smaller part of a state, like a city or a county.



local laws

Local governments make local laws. Local laws are just for people in that small area, not people in the whole state or the whole country.



members of Congress

Members of Congress are the people who have the power to make federal laws.



postmarked

A postmarked letter has a mark from the post office showing where it came from.



Protection & Advocacy Agency

Protection & Advocacy Agencies (or P&As) help protect the rights of people with disabilities. The government funds these organizations.



Public (Facebook group)

If a Facebook group is “Public”, anyone can find the group, see the group’s members, and see the posts in the group.



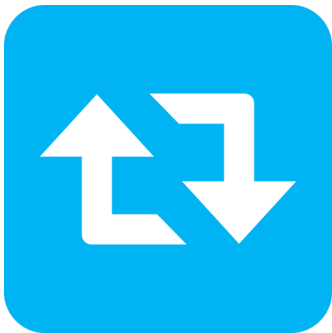
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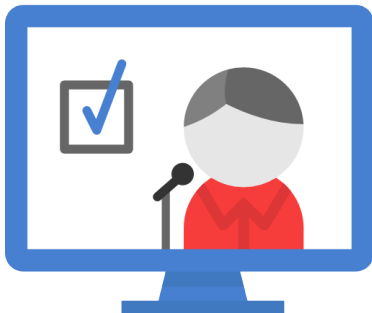
Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.



re-tweet

Re-tweeting something makes the tweet show up on your own Twitter page.



run for office

When someone wants to be an elected official, they need to run for office. When they run for office, they explain their ideas and ask people to vote for them.



Secret (Facebook group)

If a Facebook group is “Secret”, nobody can find the group unless they are invited to join it.



Senate

The Senate is one of the two parts of Congress. There are 100 Senators in the U.S. Senate. There are two Senators for each state.



Senators

Senators are the elected officials in the Senate.



social media

Social media is any place online where people can interact with each other. Some examples are Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.



state government

State governments are almost exactly the same as the federal government. State governments are just on a smaller scale. State governments make laws that apply to their states.



state laws

State laws are laws only for people who live or work in a specific state.



State Legislature

The State Legislature is the part of the state government that makes laws. Most State Legislatures have two parts, like the U.S. Congress does.



term

How long an elected official can serve in government before another election.



trending

When a hashtag on Twitter is trending, that means a lot of people are using that hashtag at the same time. That hashtag will show up on the front page of Twitter.



tweet

A short post made on Twitter. Tweets have to be 140 characters or fewer. "Tweet" can also be used as a verb.



Twitterbomb

An organized effort by many people tweeting using the same hashtag.

Twitterbombs make it so lots of people see tweets with that hashtag.



vote absentee

Voting absentee means you vote by mail instead of going somewhere to vote.

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