



How to Start a JRS/USA Action Team

This guide is intended for students who wish to establish a JRS/USA Action Team on campus.

1. Create a Mission Statement

Creating a mission statement is integral to the success of an organization and ensures that members maintain strong connections to the group's overarching goals. The mission statement should reflect JRS/USA's mission to accompany, serve, and defend refugees and vulnerable migrants (www.jrsusa.org/about) and help members and the general public understand why the group was created as well as what it hopes to achieve.

Keep the mission statement broad and concise. Members and non-members alike should be able to understand the club's goals and purpose after reading it. Choose positive and informative words when crafting your mission statement, and keep it simple enough to communicate in a few specific words or phrases. JRS, for example, seeks to accompany, defend, and serve refugees and vulnerable migrants.

Sample Mission Statement

The JRS/USA Action Team seeks to ensure that all members of the school community know JRS/USA's position on refugees and internally displaced people and support JRS/USA by sponsoring advocacy/fundraising activities in school in conjunction with JRS/USA.

2. Build Your Foundations

Form Your Core Group

Getting an action team off the ground takes some work, so finding a group of 3-5 people committed to the team's mission is essential. This core group forms the heart of the team and coordinates preparation and organization of the team's meetings and events. Once the core is formed, it's time to expand (ideally between 10-50 people), but how do you get those new members?

In fundraising they say, "People give to people." The same idea applies to member recruitment! Use face-to-face contact whenever possible, and try the following methods to get new members rolling in. When talking to potential recruits begin with your mission and then discuss goals and objectives.



How to Start a JRS/USA Action Team

Engage fellow students in conversation

- Speak informally with your classmates and other students during any free times in the day
- Discuss your team's mission with small groups of interested people, and listening carefully to their reactions and suggestions
- Set up an info table in your cafeteria, quad, or the dorms
- Recruit highly interested people to speak with other students and groups. Greater outreach to individuals and groups will result.
- Seek out members of the community who have skills/connections that would help the club address Other Clubs
- Speak to other clubs you're a member of as well as any clubs in the school or the community that are willing to listen. Ex: Student government, social justice groups, faith groups
- Be inclusive of people different cultures and ethnic groups. Diversity offers a broad range of ideas, opinions, talents and connections.

Keep Records

Make note of everyone you speak with, and be sure to record the contact information, skills, ideas, and level of interest.

Cura Personalis – a Jesuit term for caring for the person--important for this activity!

- Contact new volunteers within two days at most. Provide any additional information for which they ask within the same amount of time. If you don't have all the information that they want, contact them anyway. It's important to assure them of their importance to the club and you.
- Personal contact is essential to success. Feel free to use email or texting as contact methods, but remember that phone calls are more personal, especially with people whom you wish to become more actively involved. Phone calls indicate that you care.

Spread the Word

- Use numerous methods to advertise your new team. Post flyers around campus, pass out informational handouts, use school media (newspaper, TV, announcements), etc. Make sure advertisements are eye-catching, easy to understand, and include contact information.
- Host informational meetings and include refreshments, even if it's only a can of soda. One of the easiest ways to get people at your meeting is the mention of free food (especially pizza).
- Encourage group members talk up the Action Team to friends, neighbors, and classmates.
- Don't forget the power of social media! Establish a Facebook page, post information on friends' walls, twitter about upcoming information sessions, blog your ideas, etc.



How to Start a JRS/USA Action Team

3. Establish Your Action Team with the School Administration

Know Your School's Rules

Find out what is needed to start a new club at the school as well as what you can and cannot do as a club e.g., fundraising and demonstrating regulations. (For High School Students: Find out when parental permission is needed for club activities.)

Find a Faculty Advisor

Most schools require a faculty advisor, who will serve as your liaison between you and the administration. Effective faculty advisors are a huge asset, and they can be effective tools in providing advice, offering ideas, and helping you present your ideas to other faculty (who in turn can help more students get involved). A Jesuit would be great in this role if available, but any teacher or staff member who is interested in the work of JRS/USA would be ideal.

Secure Funding

Many schools offer funding for new clubs. Check in with your student government officials or school administration to see if funding is available and how to apply.

4. Get Organized

Establish Roles in the JRS/USA Action Team

From the very start of the club it is important to assign responsibility for the required tasks. The following "jobs" are most common:

- Chair to run the meeting
- Secretary
- Event Chair
- Publicity Chair
- Treasurer
- Student Government Representative

Schedule your Meetings

Regularly scheduled meetings enable members and interested parties to stay informed of the team's activities. When scheduling meetings, avoid conflicts with other clubs and sports, and make sure to send people reminders of meeting times (through Facebook, email, etc.) If possible, place a bulletin board near the location of your meetings to allow people who can't attend to keep informed. Also send out emails with brief notes from the meetings as well as any activities/events that are coming up. Don't forget to provide time for socializing, and if possible, refreshments!



How to Start a JRS/USA Action Team

Register your Action Team with JRS/USA

Officially register Action Team with JRS/USA. Registered action teams receive a membership kit, as well as access to nationwide Action Team Networking calls and direct support from JRS/USA staff. To register, please contact the JRS Outreach Coordinator at jrsoutreach@jesuit.org and provide: your contact information, your Action Team's school/location, your mission statement, and your current membership total.

5. Hit the Ground Running

Congratulations! You've just created a JRS Action Team on your campus. Now get out there and advocate, act, and give voice to your brothers and sisters worldwide!

Tools and Resources

JRS Action Teams will not only have access to JRS Action Networking calls, bi-monthly email updates, personal support from the JRS/USA team, and opportunities to work with other teams nationwide, they will also receive a JRS Action Team Kit.

JRS Action Team Kit

- JRS/USA brochures
- KBI brochures
- A list of JRS/USA's current advocacy priorities
- Advocacy Guide
- Suggested Activities
- Suggested Meeting Outline
- Recent copies of The Refugee Voice
- JRS Action Network Stickers

We encourage JRS Action Teams to provide new membership kits for all those who are new to the action team. These kits contain helpful information for the new member to understand JRS/USA and how it works, as well as the overall purpose and goals of the JRS Action Team.

New Membership Kit

- JRS/USA brochures
- KBI brochures
- Club fact sheet including officers' contacts and Action Team information
- List of JRS/USA's current advocacy priorities and the Action Teams advocacy priorities
- Advocacy Guide
- Recent copies of The Refugee Voice
- A JRS Action Network Sticker

Questions: Please contact the JRS Outreach Coordinator at jrsoutreach@jesuit.org.

A. Meet n' Greet

Prior to the meeting, make sure the officers and founding members are around to welcome any new guests. This time can be used to build club rapport, grab snacks (if provided), and network.

B. Check-In

Use this time to sign-in current members and gather contact information for new visitors. Check-in should also be used as a short time to build rapport with the club, and can be done using an icebreaker (see Icebreaker Packet).

C. Celebrate Success

It's important to highlight the successes of recent projects and to recognize group members who've put in a lot of hard work for the group. Consider creating a "Member of the Month" which will be recognized at this time.

D. Review the Previous Meeting

This section of the meeting should be run by your secretary (notes taker), and will review a brief recap of what was discussed and decided during the last meeting.

E. Current Projects

During this time, the group will discuss what needs to be done to complete current projects. This includes recruiting volunteers to run upcoming events, compiling necessary materials for upcoming events, making group decisions, etc. Depending on the event and the size of your Action Group, it may be more effective to create sub-committees that are focused on more specific components of an event. If you use this method, consider providing some time for sub-committees to meet during the meeting, and then come back together as the entire group.

F. Future Projects

Use this time to inform the group of which projects you'd like to pursue further down the line. You may want to allow group members to vote on which projects to pursue, and this time can be used to gain early input and ideas.

G. JRS Action Alert

Whenever JRS issues an action alert, you can use this time to review the issue with the group and help JRS take action by writing letters, emails, or making phone calls.

H. Action Items

Use this time to announce the next meeting, review the decisions made during the current meeting, and ensure that everyone is aware of their assignments for the next meeting.

Tip: Provide meeting outlines for group members every meeting. This will help keep people on track and give everyone an idea of what to expect!

Suggested Meeting Outline

ACTION Network



Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
www.jrsusa.org

SAMPLE AGENDA

JRS Action Group—February 1, 2011

- A. Check-In
- B. Icebreaker
- C. Recent Successes
 - a. Fundraiser totals
 - b. Refugee Awareness Day—a success!
 - c. Member of the Month
- D. Notes from Last Meeting
- E. Current Projects
 - a. MRA Funding Letter-writing Drive
 - b. JRS Fundraiser
- F. Future Projects
 - a. Awareness Campaign
- G. JRS Action Alert
 - a. Support Peace in Colombia
- H. Action Items
 - a. Next Meeting: March 1, 2011
 - b. Assignments Recap

Fact: With an ongoing conflict that has internally displaced over 5 million people and forced another half a million to flee to neighboring countries, Colombia now endures the largest displacement crisis in the world.

Sample Meeting Agenda

ACTION Network



Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
www.jrsusa.org

JRS/USA asks every action group to taking at least one significant action (ie: hosting a fundraiser, hosting a refugee awareness day, educating the community on a JRS priority issue, etc.) on behalf of JRS/USA during the year. Early in the year, action groups should dedicate a significant portion of their meetings to creating an "Action Plan" which includes long-term and short-term goals and projects. Together, members will decide what they'd like to pursue as a club, which will in turn help the group maintain an effective focus throughout the year.

Mission Statement: The JRS/USA Action Team seeks to ensure that all members of the school community know JRS/USA's position on refugees and internally displaced people and support JRS/USA by sponsoring advocacy/fundraising activities in school in conjunction with JRS/USA.

Our Goals:

- 1. Host a Refugee Awareness Day
 - a. Have at least 50 people participate
- 2. Hold a fundraiser for a JRS project (TBD)
 - a. Raise at least \$50
- 3. Educate at least 100 people about refugees, internally displaced persons and JRS' work
- 4. Acquire at least 10 Action Group members

The JRS Action Group's goals will be met by completing the following objectives:

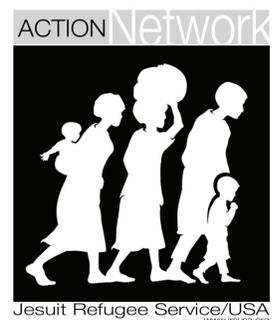
Recruitment

- 1. Develop an outreach plan
 - a. Who are we trying to reach?
 - i. Students at our High School/College
 - b. How will we reach them?
 - i. School Announcements
 - ii. Social Media
 - 1. Create Facebook Page
 - iii. Word of Mouth
 - iv. Club Fairs
- 2. Develop Relationships with new targets
 - a. Inform at least 200 people about the creation of the JRS Action Group
 - b. Acquire at least 10 Action Group members

Indicators of Success:

- 1. School announcements enacted, Facebook page created, informational sessions held, club fairs attended
- 2. 10 Action Group members acquired

Sample Action Plan



Events

3. Host a Refugee Awareness Day
 - a. Goal: Have at least 50 people participate
 - b. Schedule JRS/USA speaker for event and at least 2 other speakers
 - c. Provide opportunities for students to take advocacy action:
 - i. Letter Writing Station
 - ii. Phone Calling Station
 - iii. Petition available to sign
 - d. Post facts about current refugee statistics and issues around campus
 - e. Collect Contact Information
 - i. For JRS/USA email list
 - ii. For people interested in joining the JRS Action Group

Indicators of Success:

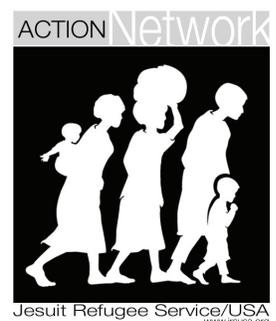
1. Event Held
2. At least 50 people participated in event
3. At least 30 people took advocacy action in conjunction with the event
4. At least 25 people signed up for the JRS/USA email list or expressed interest in the JRS Action group

4. Host a JRS Fundraiser
 - a. Goal: Raise at least \$50
 - b. Decide on which program the fundraiser will benefit
 - c. Educate fellow students about why you're holding the fundraiser (ie: general refugee facts, or current country conditions if the event has a country-specific focus)

Indicators of Success:

1. Fundraiser carried out and at least \$50 raised
 2. At least 30 new people informed about refugee issues
5. Special Events (ie: Haiti Commemoration,)
 - a. Throughout the year, the JRS Action Group will participate in special events (as determined) which may include short-term and long-term projects. The JRS Action Group will be responsible for helping enact projects and determining how to best raise JRS awareness and garner new contacts through the projects.

Sample Action Plan



Suggested Activities

ACTION Network



Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
www.jrsusa.org

Schedule an In-District Lobby Visit

Meeting with members of Congress and their staffers face-to-face sends a very powerful message and ensures that your voice is heard. Lobby visits can be done individually or in a group. Learn more about in-district lobby visits in your Advocacy 101 packet.

Host a Letter Writing Campaign

Studies show hand-written letters are among the most powerful ways to reach members of Congress. Choose one of JRS/USA's current advocacy priorities and bring together friends, family, and community members to get their voices heard! A letter writing guide may be found in your Advocacy 101 packet.

Call Congress

Phone calls can be made daily, weekly, or in response to specific JRS Action Requests. Keep your call brief and issue-specific, and make sure you identify yourself as a constituent! Example:

"Hi, my name is and as a concerned citizen, I urge you to do all you can to [insert issue here]." Learn more about calling Congress in your Advocacy 101 packet.

Host a Refugee Awareness Day/Week

Invite speakers to talk on refugee issues, post facts around campus, the community, or in your parish, hold letter writing campaigns, and perform demonstrations. This is your chance to get creative and get the word out about refugees and displaced persons.

Host a Bread Break

Food for fellowship. Food for Thought. Fuel for Change. Engage in the process of accompaniment, which at its root means "to break bread together." JRS Break Breaks provide the opportunity for socially minded individuals to network, learn about a current refugee issue, and take advocacy action together. For more information on JRS Bread Breaks, please visit the JRS Outreach Page: <http://jrsusa.org/signup>.

Invite a JRS Representative To Speak

JRS representatives are available to speak to your school, community, or parish about current refugee issues, JRS' experience of working with the forcibly displaced and effective ways to promote positive change for our vulnerable brothers and sisters. Contact the Outreach Coordinator at jrsoutreach@jesuit.org to request a speaker.

Hold a Prayer Vigil for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants

Whether it's a simple, candle-lit vigil in a public space or a more formal event with speakers and music, vigils are effective tools for engaging the community in reflective prayer and action around humanitarian concerns.

Suggested Activities

ACTION Network



Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
www.jrsusa.org

Host JRS/USA's Traveling Photo Exhibit

JRS/USA's photo exhibit features 4 oversized (5ft x 8ft) images from professional photographer and JRS supporter Don Doll, S.J. It is available for loan, and requests may be sent to the Outreach Coordinator at jrsoutreach@jesuit.org or (202) 629-5945.

Hold a Fundraiser for JRS Programs

Schools, parishes, and communities across the nation have utilized creative methods to support JRS's programs worldwide. From "free dress days" on high school campuses, to basketball games, auctions, dinner parties, and more, the sky is the limit in JRS supporters' creative forms of support.

Engage the Media and Spread the Word

Engaging the local media is one of the most effective ways to spread the word about upcoming events, desired advocacy actions, and informing the masses about refugee issues. Write a letter to the editor, contact your local news stations, and request more coverage of humanitarian concerns worldwide. On a school campus? Ask your newspaper or TV station to feature an article on refugee issues.

Host a JRS Way of the Cross

Fuse social justice and the plight of refugees with spirituality in this interactive interpretation of the traditional Stations of the Cross. Host a discussion afterwards on how people felt moved by the experience and provide ways they can take action. Contact Kim Miller at kmiller@jesuit.org or (202) 629-5945 to request copies of the program. The online version of the JRS Way of the cross may be viewed here: <http://bit.ly/fvozAS>.

Host a Documentary and Discussion

Share one of your favorite refugee/vulnerable migrant documentaries with the local school/faith community. After the showing, facilitate a discussion with attendees addressing the issues brought up in the film. Please contact JRS if you need documentary suggestions.

Demonstrate

Once you've decided on an issue you'd like to take action on, create flyers and signs and head to a public space. Don't be afraid to get creative in spreading the word! You can also demonstrate by creating billboards or visual displays featuring refugee facts and how to take action. Place them in public spaces such as school libraries, cafeterias, church foyers, etc.



JRS/USA Advocacy Priorities

Durable solutions for Separated Refugee Minors

In many refugee populations, children become separated from their parents and are cared for by an older sibling, more distant family members or unrelated adults, or subsist in a homeless situation, and are thus especially vulnerable to abuse and neglect. JRS is aware of such children in a number of locations, for example Thailand, Nepal and several African countries, through its education and assistance programs. Present efforts to assist such children are slow, inconsistent and often ineffective. A comprehensive system to identify such children, assess their needs and find durable solutions for them. Jesuit Refugee Service/USA has an opportunity to help develop this system, and to ensure that organizations such as JRS international can contribute to its success.

Separated refugee children are especially vulnerable and need individual evaluation for immediate protection and durable solutions. Such evaluation must be done in a timely and professional manner and with appropriate involvement of JRS and other NGOs familiar with these children and their circumstances. JRS/USA wishes to contribute to efforts to improve this process.

Protection and Durable Solutions for Sudanese returnees

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA has worked in partnership over the past several years, with funding from the U.S. government, to provide education to returning Sudanese refugees as an incentive to return and a bridge to self sufficiency. Advocacy is required to support the continuation of this program, and to ensure that refugees returning to Southern Sudan continue to receive the support and assistance needed to make an informed and voluntary choice to repatriate and to rebuild their lives in Southern Sudan. The renewal of U.S. government funding for JRS activities in Sudan provides opportunities for ongoing cooperation.

The success of the peace agreement in Southern Sudan and the welfare of the Sudanese refugee population depend on continued diplomatic involvement by the United States and the continued availability of sufficient resources to support sustainable repatriation. Premature withdrawal of support may lead to the failure of the repatriation process and jeopardize security in the region. JRS Eastern Africa projects and activities play an important role in encouraging and sustaining return and should receive continuing support.

The Anti-Landmine Campaign

Each year, some 26,000 people are killed or mutilated by landmines, which pose a severe hazard to human life in some 70 countries. People displaced by humanitarian disasters are frequently the victims of landmines during their flight and are often prevented from returning home at the end of a conflict because the presence of mines renders their roads unsafe and their fields unfarmable. The elimination of landmines is a major concern to JRS both internationally and in the United States. Jesuit Refugee Service/USA supports the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines which is working to further this goal.



JRS/USA Advocacy Priorities

Durable Solutions for Stateless Dominican Children of Haitian Descent and Haitian refugees in the Dominican Republic

U.S. government policies and UNHCR mechanisms have not adequately addressed the protection needs of Haitian refugees in the Dominican Republic and their stateless children. The Dominican government continues to deny nationality to children of Haitian asylum seekers born in the Dominican Republic, despite an Inter-American Court Case that found the government in violation of its own constitution. UNHCR has been unable to establish a presence in the Dominican Republic to provide these refugees with needed protection.

Haitians who merit refugee status and stateless Dominican-Haitian children are living in particularly vulnerable situations within the Dominican Republic. They face arbitrary detention, persecution, neglect and the constant threat of trafficking. The Dominican government has refused to comply with its own laws regarding the citizenship criteria and consistently engages in massive deportations of Haitians without vetting the merits of cases of individuals claiming asylum. The situation of Haitian refugees and stateless people of Haitian descent living in the Dominican Republic is such that the U.S. and the UNHCR ought to begin to resettle discreet groups of particularly vulnerable individuals.

Protection and Durable Solutions for Colombian Refugees

Jesuit Refugee Service supports a negotiated resolution of the armed civil conflict in Colombia and advocates for policies that will lead to a just and sustainable peace in that country. Toward that end, JRS has successfully advocated to encourage U.S. policy makers to shift the focus of U.S. foreign aid to Colombia away from military support, and toward greater contributions to humanitarian aid and programs for sustainable development. In cooperation with our partners in Colombia we work to protect the human rights and dignity of all Colombians, with particular attention to refugees and internally displaced persons, and to promote the participation of civil society organizations in Colombian politics.

Colombian refugees often suffer secondary persecution in their countries of first asylum. In Panama, Colombian refugees living in the border regions are only granted indefinite temporary status and are confined to an area of the country without services, schools, medical facilities, or state infrastructure. In Ecuador and Venezuela the opportunities for durable solutions are inadequate due to poorly functioning asylum systems, xenophobia, and lack of physical security. Food security is increasingly becoming an issue for Colombian refugees with pending asylum cases in Ecuador.

JRS-Ecuador has begun to address trends of victimization and violence against Colombian refugee women in Ecuador, an issue that has received little attention in the global community. The U.S. and global donations to refugee needs in the region continue to be insufficient for full-funding of UNHCR and NGO efforts on the ground.



JRS/USA Advocacy Priorities

Detention in the U.S. and Abroad

In 2008, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA conducted an informal survey of the religious services available for immigration detainees at non-federal detention facilities. The survey confirmed that the level of religious care available to detainees, especially at county and state jails, is substandard or inconsistent. Implementation of religious services standards is not well supported or enforced, and as a result, many detainees are not guaranteed access to appropriate religious services.

Legislative or administrative codification of religious detention standards is secured, so as to guarantee access to appropriate religious services for those held in detention centers, particularly for those immigrants incarcerated in private contract or local state-run facilities. Additionally, the implementation guidelines issued by the Administration in the coming year will include necessarily robust and definitive guidance for detention facilities that fully delineates what steps facilities must undertake to be in compliance with the Religious Practices standard.

JRS/USA believes detainees have a right to religious services. To guarantee that they will enjoy this right, legislation or binding regulations along with robust implementation guidance and oversight is needed. Religious services provisions must be standardized, supported and enforced at all facilities that hold immigration detainees.

In many countries, including the United States, JRS is active in working to assist refugees and asylum seekers subject to detention. Over the past decade the use of detention to discourage, control and punish asylum seekers has increased worldwide, affecting refugees and asylum seekers. In the past year, with the encouragement of JRS, the International Detention Coalition (IDC) has become established as a central point for international advocacy on this issue, and UNHCR has shown increasing interest in dialogue with the international NGO community addressing this issue.

In the United States, the Administration has indicated that it may be willing to take a more flexible position on the use of detention, and has acknowledged the link between US effectiveness in pursuing its international migration policies and U.S. domestic detention reforms. The Protection Committee of RCUSA and Detention Watch Network see new opportunities for advocacy to limit the use of detention. JRS/USA will work both nationally and internationally with JRS international offices and through our coalition partners to address this issue.

JRS/USA believes the use of detention is in almost all instances inappropriate for asylum seekers and refugees. Administrative detention should be used as rarely as possible, and alternatives to detention should be identified and used.



JRS/USA Advocacy Priorities

Protection assistance, rehabilitation and reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka

The defeat of the Tamil insurgency in northern Sri Lanka has resulted in massive displacement of the civilian population. U.S. and international engagement is needed to protect the rights of those now held in detention by the government, to ensure their rapid return to their homes and to provide the relief and development assistance necessary to rebuild their communities. The U.S. must press the government of Sri Lanka to seek equitable political and economic arrangements that will lead to reconciliation and a just and lasting peace. Sri Lanka is of humanitarian and political importance to the United States, and sustained and principled U.S. engagement is needed.

The Bhutanese in Nepal

Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have languished in refugee camps for seventeen years while hoping for an opportunity to return to their homeland in safety and dignity. To date, no progress toward repatriation has been achieved, despite intensive diplomatic efforts.

In the absence of other durable solutions, Jesuit Refugee Service has worked for the resettlement of this community in the United States and other countries, and is supporting JRS Nepal in its efforts to ensure that the refugee population has full and accurate information on resettlement so that they may make an informed choice about this option. We are also working to ensure that the Bhutanese continue to receive adequate assistance and education while they remain in Nepal, and to organize volunteers in the U.S. to provide a welcome for those who are resettled here.



ADVOCACY 101



What is Congressional Advocacy?

Put simply, advocacy means having conversations with your elected officials and their staffs. This packet outlines many of the means available to communicate with your members of Congress and their staffs—from in-person meetings to snail mail, email, and phone calls.

Why Bother?

While the concept is simple, the effects are HUGE. Your members of Congress rely on your votes to get them re-elected, and consequently, your opinions and desires matter to them. However, your elected officials aren't mind readers, so it's important that we hold them accountable for both their actions and inactions on humanitarian issues.

**When advocating it's important to remember:
Be specific. Be brief. Be honest. Be persistent.**

IN-DISTRICT MEETINGS

Not in Washington DC? Get heard in **YOUR district.** Members of Congress emphasize the importance of hearing from their constituents when making their voting decisions. In-district meetings allow JRS supporters to gather information and let Congresspersons know that their constituents CARE about refugees and forcibly displaced persons.

1. Do Your Research. Go to our advocacy site: <http://capwiz.com/jesuit/dbq/officials/> to find out who your Congresspersons are, and then do a “Google” search to determine their voting records on refugee and immigration issues.

2. Gather a group. Bringing along backup makes meetings less intimidating and shows that multiple constituents care about an issue. Aim for 2-5 participants (or more if space allows) who are passionate about the issue and/or have personal stories to share.

3. Schedule a meeting. Call or email your Senators and Representatives local offices to schedule meeting. You can find their contact information online at <http://capwiz.com/jesuit/dbq/officials/>. When speaking to the staffer, make sure you check on space limitations, so you can arrange an appropriate sized group.

4. Be Prepared. Decide who will be the point person for the group and also determine who will introduce the group, address the issues, and make “*the ask*.” When planning, think about the message you want to express to your Member, and how effectively communicate it. The *ask*—the action you desire to be taken by the Member—is the most important part of the meeting, and it’s important to determine what it is and to respond if the Member reacts positively or negatively. You may want to prepare a list of talking points that will help guide your meeting *and* provide the staffer with information to look at after you leave.

5. The Meeting. Start by thanking the Member/staff for their time, introducing yourselves and identifying yourselves as constituents. State the reason for your visit (a humanitarian concern or particular legislation) and then discuss your talking points. It’s important to *listen* to your Congressperson/staff during the meeting and ask questions to determine how they feel about the issue. Make your “*ask*” at the end of the meeting (ie: Please support the HEAR Act.), and thank the Member/aide for their time. If you created a talking points sheet, be sure to leave them copies, and make note of any additional information they requested. End the meeting on a positive note and thank the Member/aide for their time. **Important:** Never make up information! If you don’t know an answer, offer to look up the information and get back to them.

6. Debrief. Directly after the meeting, check-in with your group to make sure everyone is on the same page. Make sure to review what was said in the meeting, if the meeting went positively, and if additional information was requested. Determine who will follow up with the Member/staff. There’s always room for improvement, so also discuss what you did/didn’t do well.

7. Follow-Up. Send the staff you met an e-mail thanking them for their time, attaching any documents you mentioned, and restating your message and “*ask*”.

8. Share the Information. Your in-district visits are important to JRS’ advocacy efforts, so anytime you meet or speak with someone from your Members’ offices, contact Kim Miller at JRS (jrsoutreach@jesuit.org) and tell us how it went! The information you provide helps us send a stronger message when doing our DC advocacy visits to your Senators and Representatives.

WRITING LETTERS TO CONGRESS

Studies show that aside from In-person visits, handwritten letters are the most effective form of communication with Members and their staff. Typed and emailed letters also make a statement, although sometimes they can get lost in the huge amounts of correspondence Congressional offices receive daily.

Whether they're handwritten or not, your letters to Congress WILL be read, and they WILL make a difference.

TIPS FOR WRITING YOUR LETTERS

- 1. Make It Personal.** It's best to write letters to your own members of Congress, since your vote carries the most weight with them. When writing your letter, try not to send a "cookie cutter" message; instead, make the letter personal and share why the issue really means something to you.
- 2. Keep It Simple.** Congressional offices receive hundreds of letters and emails daily, so it's best to get your message across quickly and concisely. Limit your letter to one issue and stay on topic!
- 3. Request Follow-Up, but be Patient.** Letters are only the first step to conversing with your Congress Members. Always include your name and contact information in your correspondence, and request the Member/staff to respond. Due to security checks, letters sent via snail mail may take up to 2-4 weeks to be delivered, so don't fret if it takes a while to receive a response.
- 4. Don't Be Shy.** Make sure you request a specific action for the Congressperson to take. This action can be anything from co-sponsoring or supporting a bill to pushing for humanitarian aid reform.
- 5. Get Inspired.** Visit our advocacy site: <http://capwiz.com/jesuit/> to see letters JRS has already drafted for you. You can email the letter directly from the site, print it out and mail it, or use it as inspiration for your own handwritten letter.

SUGGESTED OUTLINE

- 1.** State why you're writing and explain who you are.
- 2.** Share more information about why you care about the issue. In this section, you can provide facts or personal stories related to the issue.
- 3.** Close by requesting a specific action to be taken by the Congressperson. In this paragraph, also request follow-up, and provide your contact information.

Sample Letter To Congress

The Honorable (full name)
(Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

OR

The Honorable (full name)
(Room #) (Name) House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

[Date]

Dear Representative (or Senator) _____,

I'm writing today to ask you to restore adequate funding levels to humanitarian accounts in the Fiscal Year 2011 Supplemental. As your constituent and a Jesuit Refugee Service Activist, I believe in the fundamental importance of assisting our vulnerable and often forgotten brothers and sisters abroad who have been driven from their homes by conflict, natural disaster, economic injustice, or violation of their human rights. Failure to address shortfalls in the US response to international emergencies will have dire consequences for refugees and internally displaced persons affected by worsening humanitarian disasters in Haiti, the Middle East, Darfur and Chad, the Horn of Africa, Sri Lanka, and Burma.

At the present time, lack of basic assistance and protection compounded by insecurity and political tensions is undermining the fragile reconstruction process in Haiti. In Darfur, the ongoing crisis continues to jeopardize the lives of hundreds of thousands of displaced people and push refugees into unstable and impoverished Chad. In the Middle East, the massive influx of refugees from the Iraq War places an unsupportable burden on neighboring countries. In these and other areas of crisis around the world, refugees and internally displaced persons depend on the help of the United States to provide protection and meet basic survival needs.

The US must lead the international community in developing a comprehensive humanitarian response, and that starts with restoring adequate funding levels to humanitarian accounts in the Fiscal Year 2011 War Supplemental. I thank you for all of your hard work, and I would love to continue this conversation with you. Please let me know where you stand on this issue, and if you have any questions, I would be happy to provide you with more information. I may be reached at name@website.com or (202)555-6782.

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Address]



CALL ON CONGRESS

Switchboard Number: 202-224-3121

From Switchboard, ask to be transferred to your Congressperson. Or, you can find their direct number online.

- 1. Ask to speak with the legislative aide who is working on your issue** (ie: foreign policy, immigration, etc.) They will get the message to the Representative or Senator.
- 2. Identify yourself as a constituent.** Clearly state your first and last name, your hometown, and why you are calling.
- 3. Identify the issue you are calling to discuss and make a few brief points** as to why the issue is of concern to you, your community, and the nation.
- 4. Ask the member to take action on behalf of this issue** (ie: co-sponsor a bill, vote for or against a measure, increase aid for refugees, etc.)
- 5. Request a written response** from the office on the Member's position or action on the issue you addressed.
- 6. Provide your full name, mailing address, e-mail address, and phone number.**
- 7. Thank the aide for his/her time.**

Remember:

Be polite!

Keep it brief. Keep the discussion under 5 minutes unless the staffer is engaged and asking questions.

Be Persistent! Let Congress know that you really care about the issue.

SAMPLE MESSAGES:

If the aide is not in, leave a brief message with your name, address and phone number. Briefly state why you are calling and what action you are requesting. You can request a written response.

On Colombia:

Sample message: "Hello, this is John Salinas calling from Baltimore, Maryland about the United States' policies in Colombia. I am calling to ask Senator Mikulski to push for increased aid for Colombian refugees and displaced persons. This year's budget request for refugee funding in the Migration and Refugee Assistance budget was millions of dollars less than the level it has been during the last couple of years, and the money is imperative to supporting millions of vulnerable Colombians. I would like a written response please. Again, my name is John Salinas, and my address is 82 North Street, Baltimore, Maryland, 21202. Or you may reach me by email at johnsalinas@email.com. Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you."

On Immigration Reform:

Sample message: "Hi, my name is Mary Wilson and I'm calling from Baltimore, Maryland. I am calling to ask Senator Mikulski to do all she can to enact humane immigration reform that reunifies families, limits the use of Immigration Detention, ends the detention of asylum seekers, and provides a pathway to legal status for undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers. I would like a written response please. Again, my name is Mary Wilson, and you may reach me at 82 North Street, Baltimore, Maryland, 21202 or marywilson@email.com. Thanks for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you."



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Your Turn:

Identify yourself as a constituent: _____

Identify the issue: _____

Ask the member to take action: _____

Request a written response: _____

Provide your full name,
mailing address, email address
and phone number: _____

Thank the aide: _____

Congratulations, You Just Made Your Voice Count.