



PALESTINE ADVOCACY MANUAL: WELCOMING THE 117th CONGRESS

February 2021



A GUIDE TO IN-DISTRICT ADVOCACY WEEK

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SUMMARY & UPDATE

January 2021 marked the swearing-in of the 117th Congress and the Biden administration. It was a tumultuous transfer of power -- anything but peaceful. As the dust settles, we're kicking off our efforts to convince the new administration and Congress to prioritize Palestinian rights.

Over the past five years, we have held hundreds of meetings with members of Congress and their staff. We must keep nurturing the relationships we've been building with all those offices, both allies, and naysayers. After all, that's most of what advocacy work is: building relationships. Some AMP members have close ties to their elected officials and even have the cell phone numbers of staffers. Others are just getting to know staff and are chipping away at some of the more skeptical attitudes toward Palestinian rights. Many AMP folks know that the staffers, in many cases, are much more likely to be supportive of Palestinian rights than their bosses. **We're bolstered by our successes over the years:**

- **We have built Palestine Advocacy Days from the ground up.** In 2017 we started with 67 participants from 13 states and had 54 Congressional meetings; in 2018, we had 233 participants from 25 states and 109 meetings; in 2019, we had 535 participants from 31 states and around 150 meetings, all to advocate for Palestinian rights.
- **In the context of COVID-19, we organized the first-ever Virtual Palestine Advocacy Days (V-PAD).** More than 800 people from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds from 42 states held more than 150 congressional meetings, including dozens with members of Congress themselves.
- **AMP hosted our first-ever policy forum in January 2020 with representatives of dozens of key organizations and individuals** working within the electoral system for Palestinian rights to strategize about how to leverage the 2020 elections to advance our goal. AMP followed up by convening a second virtual policy forum in July, focusing on how to impact the political conventions.
- **We convened the largest Palestine solidarity coalition to date.** AMP also took the lead in assembling and co-convening a coalition with over 60 organizations--the Palestine Federal Working Group--to coordinate federal legislative efforts broadly across the spectrum of groups supporting Palestinian rights.
- **We launched the Palestine Advocacy Corps** with our most dedicated supporters to engage in high-level policy trainings and additional advocacy opportunities.
- **We countered Israel's annexation plans by building Congressional support for sanctions.** AMP worked with several Congressional offices, including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), on legislative initiatives to cut and/or condition US funding as a response to Israel's plans to illegally annex additional Palestinian land.
- **We organized around the Israeli Annexation Non-recognition Act.** We provided critical support for Rep. Betty McCollum's historic bill to withhold US recognition of Israeli annexation and prevent the US from funding annexation.

We can be sure that Israel's lobby machine is already hard at work, but so are we. We've already delivered a petition to President Biden and sent his transition team a memo (which is included at

the end of this guide), and we sent welcome packets and meeting requests to all of the new members of the House and Senate. **Now let's get to work together!**

OUR “ASKS” FOR THIS CONGRESS

When you have the meeting, these are three main points you want to convey. In previous years, we have had numbers for specific bills, but at this early stage in the new Congress, those bills have not been reintroduced yet.

- Congress must defund Israeli human rights abuses. We believe that our tax dollars should not be used to subsidize crimes committed by anyone, including Israel.
- Congress must re-fund human needs in Palestine, including funding the appropriate UN agencies (such as the UN Relief and Works Agency, which provides services to Palestinian refugees).
- Now, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also deeply concerned about Israel's failure to meet its obligation under international law to provide vaccinations for Palestinians living under its military occupation.

HOW TO PREPARE AND EXECUTE AN ADVOCACY MEETING

From February 16-19, 2021, members of Congress will be returning to their states and districts for a short break. When Congress is in their home districts, this is typically the best time for constituents to meet with elected officials and voice their concerns locally in-person instead of traveling all the way to Washington DC. But advocacy, like many things, has moved from in-person to online as we've settled into a new way of working in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. But just because the actual experience of in-district lobbying will be different than usual doesn't make it any less important or impactful.

Connecting with your Senators and Representative to defend Palestinian rights is more important than ever, especially with the new Congressional session kicking off. This is a guide to make the process as effective as possible.

An advocacy meeting's long-term goals should include a systematic progression of teaching an elected official and/or their staff something new while continually exploring how to improve a specific set of circumstances. This is typically broken out into multiple meetings over time. Learning how to initiate and run one of these meetings is key to achieving the goals of both parties. Research, thorough preparation, and teamwork prior to a meeting are key for an effective meeting. Here are the steps to prepare for and execute a successful advocacy meeting.



Pre-Meeting: Identify, Contact & Prepare

- Identify your elected officials. Visit bit.ly/AMP-Leg-Lookup to find your Senators and Representative.
- Contact their office to coordinate the meeting. Find the contact information of your elected official on the above website or on their website under “Contact Us” or “Schedule a Meeting.” You could also visit [www.ContactingTheCongress.org](http://www>ContactingTheCongress.org), enter your address, and click on the Member of Congress's name.

If you are planning to call, make sure to call the District office number. If you are thinking about scheduling the meeting online, you can either use their website or get the Scheduler's contact info from www.ContactingTheCongress.org and email them.

The usual email format for congressional staffers is:

House of Representatives: [FirstName].[LastName]@mail.house.gov

Senate: [FirstName]_[LastName]@[LastNameOfSenator].senate.gov

As the following meeting request template shows, your request should include the following information:

- Your name and address.
Mention that you are a constituent who lives in their district/state.
- Who will be attending?
 - *We encourage you to go with at least one or two friends or family members; it's always better to have meetings in groups of 5 or less.*
- The issue you want to discuss: Make it short and clear.

- Suggest a couple of time slots for the meeting.

Once you've set up the meeting time, follow the office's preferences about where to conduct the meeting. They will most likely give you information about having it online or over the phone.

➤ Meeting Request Template

Dear [name of scheduler],

My name is [name], and I live in [Location]. I am writing as a constituent and as a supporter of American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) to request a meeting with the [Congress member]/[Senator] during the congressional district work period this month, preferably on [Date] or [Date], but we are flexible. Other constituents attending the meeting are [names].

We would like to discuss issues pertaining to Palestinian rights and legislative priorities for the 117th Congress. I can be reached at [email address] and [phone number]. Please let me know if you would like more information, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Signed,

[Name and full address]



➤ How to Prepare for the Meeting

- Research the elected official's voting history, their stance on Palestine, and any information about their staff with who you might be meeting as well.
- Identify the challenges the Member of Congress ("MoC") is facing.
- Identify how your "Ask" will impact the MoC and their base.

➤ Decide on Your "Ask"

Your "Ask" is what you're asking the Member of Congress to do after your meeting that will advance your cause through a legislative vehicle. Our asks for these advocacy meetings are listed and explained later in this packet. In general, the more specific your Ask is, the better. One or two is best.

➤ Create a Meeting Agenda

Creating an agenda for the meeting will ensure that all items are covered in the time allocated for the meeting. Make sure to state the goal of the meeting. You should not share this agenda with the office, but it will help you and your team organize your thoughts. The meeting should be formal but flow naturally, so not too stiff.

➤ Select a Meeting Leader

It is important that one person leads the meeting. This person will be responsible for ensuring that all items on the agenda are covered, and the meeting is on time.

The meeting leader is also responsible for:

1. Keeping the meeting focused and productive.
2. Moderating the discussion and prompt thoughtful participation.
3. Ensuring that any meeting infiltrators are cut off, ejected from the meeting, and any harmed comments they've made are responded to and disavowed.
4. Identifying any supporting documentation needed to address any concerns.
5. Identifying any actions your team can pursue to ensure that the elected official supports your Asks.
6. Asking if the elected official will support your Asks (the "close").
7. Outlining follow-up actions.



Challenges if there is not a single person running a meeting

1. No one will take the initiative to move to the next topic or there will be disagreement on what is covered next.
2. The guests in the meeting will not know who to look to next.
3. Agenda items are missed.
4. No one asks for the close because everyone will think someone else will do it.

Importance of Time Check

1. Plans for the most important information to be covered.
2. Encourages people to ask the questions they want without running out of time.
3. Ensures that the meeting is inclusive, and everyone has time to contribute.

Conducting the Meeting

When your meeting day comes, make sure to:

- Have the connection details on hand in advance, whether it's Zoom, Webex, conference call, etc.
- Make sure everyone else on your team has the conference call number or link to connect to the virtual meeting place. Resolve as many technical issues as possible before the meeting takes place.

When you are in the meeting, each person in your team should take turns discussing why you are there. Each person should talk no more than 3 minutes.

➤ Your talking points for each person should be limited to or include personal stories, expertise, and someone to lay out your ask(s).

When you tell your personal story to an elected official or their staff, keep these things in mind:

- Why should they care? How is this related to US policy? Is there something that the US government is doing that is enabling an injustice that you, or someone you know, is impacted by?
 - How is your story emblematic of a broader trend? It's important to demonstrate that the injustice you are describing is impacting many people.
 - Why and how can this Member of Congress and/or their staff make a difference?
 - Try to provide specific information that they wouldn't have gotten anywhere else (For example, "My friends and family in Palestine have reported that...", "Did you know that the Israeli government has recently been..." etc.)
- Ask if you can take a group photo with your elected official and/or staff right before the end of the meeting. For online meetings, **take a screenshot of your computer**. This will be great for your report back and fundraising (and an awesome photo to share on your social media!).

Follow up and report back

Make sure to follow up and send a thank you note to everyone you met with right after the meeting. Recap your key points and add any additional information.

After that, send an email to the AMP Advocacy Director Raed to let him know how the meeting went:

Advocacy@ampalastine.org

Congratulations! Hopefully, you've had a successful meeting experience. If this is your first time, this is the beginning of your ongoing relationship with the office of your elected official that you will need to maintain over time.



➤ Sample Follow-up email

Dear [staffer's name here],

Thank you again for meeting with your constituents from American Muslims for Palestine.

As we mentioned in the meeting, American Muslims for Palestine is dedicated to advancing the movement for justice in Palestine through education, advocacy, and grassroots mobilization. AMP is committed to ending US support for the Israeli occupation, raising awareness about the plight of the Palestinian people, and supporting Palestinians' right to freedom, justice, and self-determination in accordance with international law.

In the past few years, our work has revolved around a couple of major themes. One has been asking Congress to defund Israeli human rights abuses because we believe that our tax dollars should not be used to subsidize crimes committed by anyone, including Israel. Another theme has been to re-fund human needs in Palestine, including funding the appropriate UN agencies (such as the UN Relief and Works Agency). Now, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also deeply concerned about Israel's failure to meet its international obligation to provide vaccinations for Palestinians living under its military occupation.

The Israeli government has enjoyed support from the US government with impunity for far too long. We support Palestinian rights and ultimately a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis. We hope that your office and the 117th Congress will take our perspective into consideration. If you have questions or follow up, please don't hesitate to reach out to us any time.

Signed,

[Your name]

Let us know how everything goes! Email Advocacy Director Raed Jarrar at Advocacy@ampalestine.org.