Yardley Friends

MEETING

A Guide for **Individual Advocacy**

About This Guide

These pages are designed as a starting point for individuals who want to become more involved in advocacy and working for social change. Since the inception of the Religious Society of Friends, Quakers have advocated for positive social change, from the abolition of slavery to women's rights and an end to wars. Consider this a toolkit of resources to begin your journey into advocacy with the support of a long history of Quaker activism.

This guide will show you how to identify your top policy issues, reach your representatives and make your voice heard. While taking individual action is important, we are exponentially more powerful when we stand together and act in community to develop and execute coordinated campaigns. Together, we can take action for real and lasting change.

— Yardley Friends

Part 1: Identifying Your Core Issues

Most of us want to make a positive difference for ourselves, our families, and our communities. With so much going on in the world, it's difficult to know where to start. The sheer volume of issues that affect us directly or our world at large is daunting — from war to genocide, political upheaval, inequity, poverty, and so much more.

Unless you have an inhuman amount of time and resources, attempting to make a difference on every issue can easily lead to spreading yourself thin, overwhelm, and demoralization.

That's why doing a quick assessment is crucial first step. This section is all about reflection, determining what is most important to you, and exploring where you can make the biggest impact.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What are my core values and which issues best align with those values?
- Why do I want to get involved in advocacy work? Which issue or issues are motivating me to take action?
- What issue most affects my community and those I care about?
- What issues affect people who are marginalized? How can my voice help advocate for them?
- What gifts do I posess? How can I use these skills for advocacy? Can my professional or life experience be an advantage in advocating for any particular Issues?
- Who is in my social networks and community and what issues could we best work together for a common purpose?

In a Friends Meeting, core Quaker testimonies can also form a powerful basis for reflection when examining these questions.

- **Simplicity** — Focusing on what is truly important and letting other things fall away.

- **Peace** — Seeking justice and healing for all people; taking away the causes of war in the ways we live.

- **Integrity** — Living as whole people who act on what we believe, tell the truth and do what we say we will do.

- **Community** — Supporting one another in our faith journeys and in times of joy and sorrow; sharing with and caring for each other.

- **Equality** — Treating everyone, everywhere, as equally precious to God; recognizing that everyone has gifts to share.

- **Stewardship (of the Earth)** — Valuing and respecting all of God's creation; using only our fair share of the earth's resources; working for policies that protect the planet.

Source: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Need help brainstorming?

If you need to narrow your list of ideas, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) provides a helpful overview of its primary issues. FCNL.org is a great place to start.

Part 2: Who Represents You?

In the U.S., we elect leaders to represent our interests from the school board to the White House. One of the most effective things we can do as individuals is ensure that our elected representatives know how their decisions affect us and the communities they represent.

First, you need to find out who your elected officials are and how to contact them.

Use these tools to look up your representatives

U.S.

Look up your U.S. members of Congress

State

Look up your Pennsylvania representative or senator

Look up your New Jersey assembly member or senator (map)

Local

Use interactive Bucks County, PA, map

Look up Montgomery County, PA, elected officials

Look up Mercer County, NJ, elected officials

Look up Hunterdon County, NJ, elected officials

If you are reading a paper copy of this guide, scan the QR code or visit linktr.ee/friendsreading to access the links.

Other local representatives

Depending on the issues you selected in part 1, it may be important to know other local contact information. For example, if you chose immigration as an issue, knowing how your local law enforcement handles federal immigration detainer requests or what policies a school district has in place for its students can be crucial. Those local elected officials are people who live in your neighborhood and represent you, which means those are vital local polices you can influence today. Here is a list at some key elected offices you may want to look up based on where you live:

- School board members
- County commissioners or judges
- City, borough or township council members or mayors
- Sheriffs
- District attorneys

Part 3: Outreach

Now, you have your top issues in mind and your representative's contact information in hand. It's time to make your voice heard. You can contact your local officials in a variety of ways, including through local public meetings, phone calls or emails.

Phone Calls and Email

You might be asking yourself if your phone call or email makes a difference? The short answer is, yes!

Read more: Does Calling Congress Really Work? - RepresentUs

Before you reach out, think about what you want to convey. Personal stories are also a powerful way to share your message. Think about how you could use a personal story to show why the issue you want to discuss is meaningful to you and connects with your values.

Having trouble getting started?

Many organization websites, including FCNL.org and AFSC.org offer form emails with pre-written messages. You can also use these as scripts for your phone calls:

Visit the FCNL Action Center

Visit American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) Action page

Public Meetings

From town halls to city council and school boards, public meetings provide opportunities for you to voice your opinions. You can look up the details for these meetings on the websites related to each government body.

If attending an official meeting, it's a good idea to look at the agenda in advance and read the policies and procedures for public comment. The agenda will usually set aside a time to for the public to speak. Often, there are strict time limits (2-5 minutes). So, be sure to time and practice or write out your remarks ahead of time.

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Letters to the Editor or Op Eds

The below is reprinted with permission from FCNL.org:

Publishing letters to the editor and op-eds is a great way to get the attention of your members of Congress. But first, you need to write a piece that tells your story – not just the facts.

Here's your RAFT for engaging with the media:

Respond to Recent Reports

Find a news article or story that relates to the issue. Make sure you're responding to a recent story or topic – no more than a few days old.

Ask for Action

Make a clear and specific ask to YOUR policymakers. It is critical that you mention your members of Congress by name or else they won't see it.

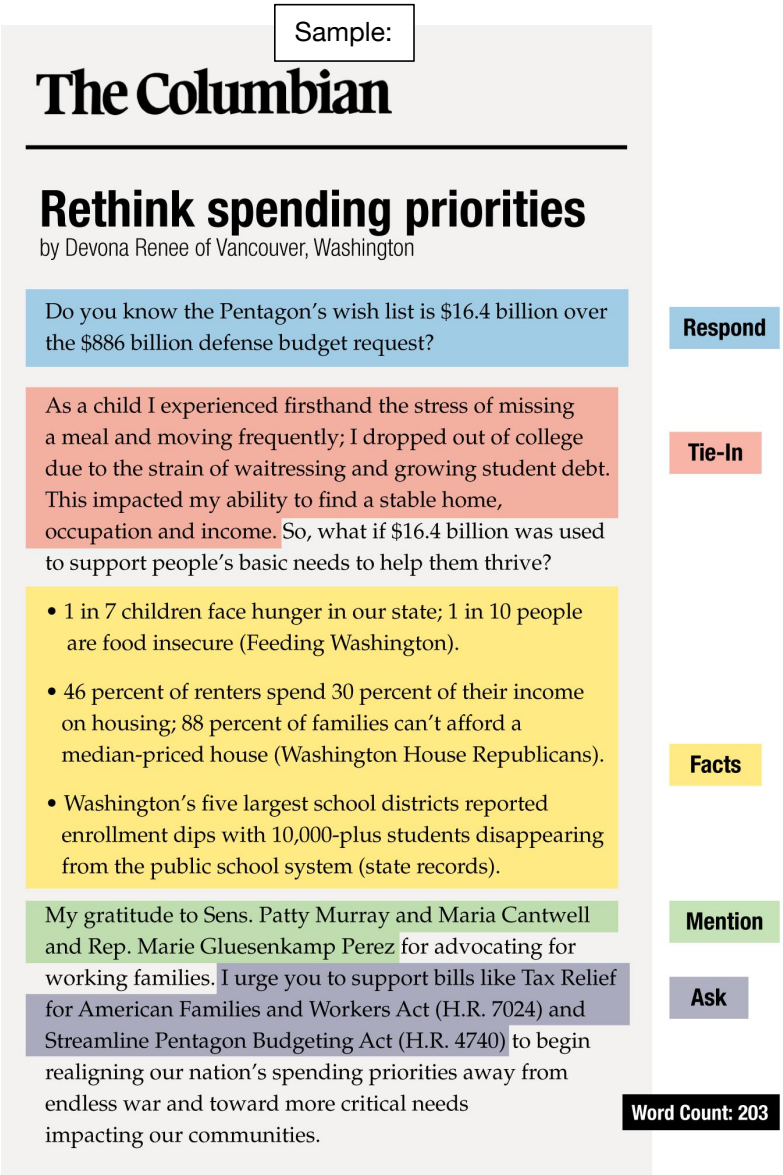
Find the Facts

Illustrate your argument with one or two facts. Statistics can be helpful in moderation, but too many statistics can be confusing. Remember, your letter should tell your story!

Tie in Your Personal Story

Bring in your personal connection or moral approach to the issue. State your connections to the community as they're relevant to the points you're making and be sure to tie your letter to local issues in your community.

Sample:



The Columbian

Rethink spending priorities

by Devona Renee of Vancouver, Washington

Do you know the Pentagon's wish list is $16.4 billion over the $886 billion defense budget request? — Respond

As a child I experienced firsthand the stress of missing a meal and moving frequently; I dropped out of college due to the strain of waitressing and growing student debt. This impacted my ability to find a stable home, occupation and income. So, what if $16.4 billion was used to support people's basic needs to help them thrive? — Tie-In

- 1 in 7 children face hunger in our state; 1 in 10 people are food insecure (Feeding Washington).
- 46 percent of renters spend 30 percent of their income on housing; 88 percent of families can't afford a median-priced house (Washington House Republicans).
- Washington's five largest school districts reported enrollment dips with 10,000-plus students disappearing from the public school system (state records).

Facts

My gratitude to Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell and Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez for advocating for working families. — Mention

I urge you to support bills like Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act (H.R. 7024) and Streamline Pentagon Budgeting Act (H.R. 4740) to begin realigning our nation's spending priorities away from endless war and toward more critical needs impacting our communities. — Ask

Word Count: 203

Tips for Submitting Letters to the Editor or Op-Eds

- **Keep it short**: Newspapers are most likely to publish letters to the editor that are short and make one succinct point (that is supported with facts or quotes from validators!). Check the newspaper you're submitting to for a word limit. If you go over the word limit your letter won't be considered for publication. If you can't find a limit, keep it to 150 words or fewer.

- **Write from your own voice**: Your piece is more likely to get published if it comes from your voice. Don't be afraid to tell your story and to appeal to the audience from the heart as well as the head.

- **Connect local issues**: newspapers prioritize publishing letters on local issues. When writing about federal or international issues, make sure you connect it back to your local community. You can mention the importance of this issue to constituents, or the impact this issue has had on your local community.

- **Submit it to the newspaper**: Submit the letter directly to the newspaper (most newspapers have an online submissions page) and follow up by phone or email if you don't get a response within a week or two. Put the letter in the body of the email to make it easy for the editorial staff to read. As you submit your letter, don't miss an opportunity to build a relationship with staff.

- **Coordinate submissions**: editors are more likely to publish one or more letters on an issue if they believe that it's an issue many individuals in your community care about. Coordinate with a group of advocates to submit unique letters to the paper on the same issue on the same day. It increases the chances that one or more of those letters get published!

- **What to do if your letter doesn't get published**: If you've waited 3-5 days and your local paper hasn't published your letter, try submitting to other nearby papers or submit to your state capitol newspaper. Or, you can try to rework your letter and re-submit to your local paper.

FCNL has numerous resources, including a form to look up local newspapers, past FCNL advocacy team letters and more at fcnl.org.

Further Reading

Online Resources

Telling Your Story - FCNL

Organize Your Community for Change: Host a local event! - FCNL

Design Your Own Creative Advocacy Action - FCNL

Write Effective Emails to Congress - FCNL

Tips on Writing to Your Elected Officials - ACLU

Campaign Strategy Workbook - Training for Change

Upside-Down Triangle: Understanding the Consent Theory of Power - Training for Change

Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement

Websites

Get Involved - American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Immigrants Rights Action

Training for Change

Books

How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning
by George Lakey

Living the Quaker Way
by P. Gulley

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