Main Street Alliance created this toolkit to help small business owners interact directly with policy leaders.
TALKING TO FEDERAL POLICY MAKERS ABOUT RELIEF & RECOVERY

Requesting a Meeting: Call the office you would like to meet with to find out how they take meeting requests. Some policy leaders will have a standardized meeting request form or special scheduling email address which can expedite the process.

REQUESTING A MEETING

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to request a meeting with [REPRESENTATIVE or SENATOR] to discuss urgent needs for small businesses and our employees amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as we try to make it through to the other side.

I am a constituent and the owner of [BUSINESS NAME], with stores in [CITY/TOWN] and a member of Main Street Alliance, a national network of small business owners advocating for policies that protect and strengthen our businesses, our employees, and our communities. I and my fellow business owners, [NAMES and BUSINESSES], would like to share with [MEMBER OF CONGRESS] how this crisis has been playing out in our businesses and our local economy.

Small businesses like mine are doing everything in our power to overcome a crisis of scope and scale we have not seen in decades. Hundreds of thousands of businesses like mine have already closed permanently, and many more are on the brink of shuttering.

We applaud recent passage of the American Rescue Plan that includes major grant programs for heavily impacted industries, extension of the Families First and Employee Retention tax credits, and the new Community Navigator program. While federal relief programs have been made available over the past year, not all are easily accessible and larger businesses with strong banking relationships have benefited the most. Tens of millions of jobs are still at stake – along with health care, paid family and medical leave, and other important supports we and our employees need.

As we get ready for Small Business Week in early May, we look forward to meeting with [MEMBER OF CONGRESS] to discuss these new programs, gaps that remain, and how to build a small business infrastructure to ensure recovery beyond the pandemic. I can be reached at [PHONE NUMBER].

Thank you,

[YOUR FIRST & LAST NAME]

If you do not get a response to your meeting request within a week, follow up with a phone call and ask to speak to the scheduler.
PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING

BEFORE THE MEETING

Review MSA current issue backgrounders:

First 100 Days Priorities (LINK)

- COVID-19 Supports—Thank them for supporting the American Rescue Plan, which included many of these priorities, and urge robust investment in recovery
- Addressing capital, credit, and business development needs of the country’s small businesses (STILL NEEDED)
- Leveling the playing field for small businesses by supporting a safety net for small businesses and their employees. (STILL NEEDED – Paid Family & Medical Leave (LINK)
- Reining in monopolies and reversing corporation concentration (STILL NEEDED)

Clarify your goal & priorities: Why are you meeting with the official? To solidify support? To win support for your position? To weaken opposition?

What is your strategy: What is your primary demand? What will you ask for if the answer is yes? What if the answer is no, or a waffle? Here are things you can ask for:

- Written support for your position (Op-Ed, letter of support to legislative leadership, etc.);
- Introduce legislation;
- Co-sponsor existing legislation;
- Attend a press conference announcing support.

Meeting agenda & roles. Draft a written agenda and select speakers for each part of agenda.

CONDUCTING YOUR MEETING

Deliver a clear, compelling message. Your message isn’t just a list of bulleted policy points; it needs to convey why the elected official should care and act. Start by telling your story. Why do you care about this issue, and why are you moved to advocate for it? Then provide local context. Make a strong connection between the issue and your local community that the legislator represents. Use local examples to illustrate the importance of your issue.

Demonstrate your power. Are you a constituent? Who do you represent? How many members? What does your business (and other like or neighboring businesses) mean to the district or state?

Politely control the conversation. Remember what you came for. Politicians/staff often control conversations with small talk, offering general rather than specific support, or asking questions they know you can’t answer. Stay focused on your agenda and diplomatically move the conversation where you want it to go.

Make a hard ask & be strategic in your response. “Can we count on you to support the principles we’ve laid out?” Pause and wait for an answer. Thank supporters and help turn them into champions. Neutralize the opposition, but don’t waste too much time trying to argue with them.

Key handout to bring to or share after your meeting:

MSA Fact Sheet on Paid Family & Medical Leave (LINK)
AFTER THE MEETING

Debrief the meeting. Take a few minutes to debrief with others from your group who attended the meeting. Make sure you heard the same thing, and agree to and assign follow-up tasks. Talk through what you each did especially well and what could be strengthened for future meetings.

Share what you learned. Be sure to contact Main Street Alliance staff (both MSA State lead and MSA National Government Affairs Director Didier Trinh: didier@mainstreetalliance.org) with what you learned in the meeting, including: any commitments made; key questions or concerns raised; any additional information needed for MSA follow-up.

Recognition. Share a post about the meeting on social media. You can also tag Main Street Alliance so we can see it. Send a follow-up thank you note with any information you said you would send promptly.

Twitter: @mainstreetweets
Facebook: /mainstreetalliance
Instagram: @mainstreetalliance_

AMPLIFYING YOUR SMALL BUSINESS VOICE

RECORD AND POST A VIDEO DETAILING YOUR SITUATION

Setting up your video

1. Sit in a quiet spot with good light on your face. Do not sit in front of a window, check to make sure you are not in silhouette.
2. If you have any business items/logos nearby, you can use those as a background, otherwise simple 1 color backgrounds are best
3. Play your video back to make sure the sound is clear

Crafting your message

1. Introduce yourself and your business (how were you doing before the crisis): Number of employees, Any milestones you would have hit
2. How has coronavirus affected your business: Layoffs, Business decline, Closure
3. What are your challenges, issues with the PPP/EIDL, or your successes with the programs, why the were necessary (but not everyone could use them).
4. Be clear that we need something better: Grants for all small businesses, a permanent paid leave program.
5. If we don’t take action, what are the consequences: For your business, employees, community

Post your video and tag us!

1. Use Twitter, Instagram and Facebook on a public setting (your business page/profile)
2. Use #SmallBizNeedsNow and target your legislators and Senate Leadership (@SenateDems)
3. Highlight urgent policy needs from our 100 Day Priorities
4. TAG US so we can elevate your story

Visit our social media pages for examples and inspiration.

FACEBOOK: MAIN STREET ALLIANCE ACTION FUND | TWITTER: @MAINSTREETWEETS | INSTAGRAM: @MAINSTREETALLIANCE_