

Former congressional staffers
reveal best practices for
making Congress listen



INDIVISIBLE:

GROUP LEADER TOOLKIT

Updated on January 13, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome! You're receiving this toolkit because you, we, and more than 2,800 other groups across the country are ready to stand indivisible. This weekend, thousands of people will meet to plan the resistance against Trump's agenda, and make a plan to visit the offices of their Members of Congress next week.

Some of you may be busy planning for your first group meeting, while others are trying to fit a discussion of the Indivisible guide into a packed agenda for your hundredth meeting. But regardless of how long you've been doing this or how many people are in your group, you're not just a leader in that group—**you're an organizer.**

So: what is an organizer? An organizer is someone who brings people together and inspires them to take action. Organizers motivate and mobilize people; they build relationships with the people around them and they build a plan to act. They are leaders who lead from behind, always thinking about how they can get other people to do more.

The most important thing you can do right now is spread the word: talk to people about your group, invite them to your meeting, ask them to commit to join you, and follow up beforehand to make sure they are there. Then what? This toolkit includes materials to help you take the next step in your organizing journey, whether it's your first step or just the most recent one:

1. A sample agenda for your first organizing meeting to help your group divide up the work, make a bold plan, and put it into action.
2. Ideas for keeping your meeting on track, so that you can make a great plan and help your group mobilize to execute it.
3. A sign-in sheet for your meeting: organizing is all about relationships, and relationships are all about communication.
4. A potential first action plan so you and your group can start talking to your Members of Congress about standing up to Trump right away.
5. Tricks of the trade for getting press coverage and spreading the word about your actions on social media, so that what your group does has as big an impact as possible.
6. And information on watching out for right-wing tricks.

After your meetings, we want to hear from you! Take pictures of your group and share #StandIndivisible stories with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). Email us at field.indivisible@gmail.com to share what went well, what didn't, and what else we can do to support your amazing work.

Remember: we can do this. We will win.

KICKOFF MEETING AGENDA

PRIOR TO THE MEETING

- » Spread the word! Invite people to come, ask them to commit to joining the meeting, and follow up with them beforehand to confirm. Think about how to invite a diverse group that includes people from communities most impacted by the Trump agenda, such as people of color, immigrants, Muslims, and LGBTQ people.
- » Print out and bring sign-in sheets.
- » Designate someone to take notes during the meeting.
- » Bring a concrete idea for an action that your group will take the following week. That way, you can recruit meeting attendees to participate! We are suggesting that local groups make a plan to visit the offices of their Members of Congress next week, before Trump's inauguration as President, to tell your representatives you will stand indivisible against his racist, corrupt, authoritarian agenda.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- » Welcome everyone and outline the goals for the meeting, including:
 1. Get to know each other;
 2. Commit to the values that will guide your work in the coming months and years; and
 3. Plan and commit to your first action.
- » Write your agenda somewhere everyone can see it (or pass it out to everyone). If you are using this agenda, you can write only the bolded section headers in this document: Welcome and introductions, group name, principles, roles, communication, action plan.
- » Remind everyone of the ultimate goal: to apply pressure to your Member of Congress to stop Trump.
- » Have each person in attendance briefly introduce themselves and explain what motivated them to get involved. The amount of time you have for this will vary depending on the size of your group. If your group is large, you may want to ask everyone to keep their introduction to one sentence. Model the type of introduction you are looking for by going first.

DECIDE ON A GROUP NAME

- » If you already have a name, skip this step! Otherwise, propose a name and open the floor for additional suggestions. A good place to start is with a name that includes the geographic area of your group. If multiple names are proposed, take a vote. Try to keep this section of the meeting as short as possible—you want to get to the action.

AGREE ON PRINCIPLES

- » This is your chance to say what your group stands for. We recommend two guiding principles:
 1. Donald Trump's agenda will take America backwards and must be stopped.
 2. In order to work together to achieve this goal, we must model the values of inclusion, respect, and fairness.
- » Lay out your guiding principles and make sure there are no objections from the group. For example you can say, "Does anyone have any objections to using these principles to guide our work together?"

VOLUNTEER FOR ROLES

- » This part of the meeting will vary a lot depending on how big your group is and who is in the room. The goal is to figure out how you will divide roles and responsibilities among your group.
- » We recommend the following roles:
 - » Overall group coordination (1-2 people): Responsible for scheduling group meetings, coordinating communication within your group, and leading the group in planning and strategy for local, defensive congressional action.
 - » Media/social media lead (1 person): Responsible for coordinating your group's outreach to the media and presence on social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook).
 - » News monitoring lead (1 person): Responsible for tracking news about your Members of Congress and any major Congressional issues/decisions.

- » Congressional office tracking (1-2 people): Responsible for tracking your Member of Congress' schedule, events, and upcoming votes. This will be essential to scheduling your group's visits to your Member of Congress' office, attendance at town hall events, etc.
- » Tech and Inclusion help (1-2 people): If there are members of your group who may need extra help with internal communications like Facebook invites or emails, appoint a helpful person to make sure they're in the loop.
- » This is also a good time to talk about the different ways that group members can contribute to advocacy efforts: attending events, recording events, asking questions, making calls, hosting meetings, engaging on social media, writing op-eds for local papers, etc. Ask each person in attendance how they would like to contribute. Have your note-taker take good notes during this section. Whenever possible, have people commit to a specific action at a specific time (e.g. I will write an op-ed next week about healthcare).

ADOPT A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

- » You need a way of reaching everyone in your group in order to coordinate actions. This can be a Facebook group, a Google group, a Slack team, an email list, a phone tree—whatever people are most comfortable with.

COMMIT TO ACTION

- » Set a time and date for a specific action that your group will take the following week. It's a good idea to come to the meeting with something in mind so that you can actively recruit people to attend. Attendees may have additional ideas, and that's great! Depending on the size of your group, you can decide on one or you can organize multiple actions.
- » We are urging groups to plan a visit to their Member of Congress's district office before Trump's Inauguration on January 20th to tell them that you will be standing, indivisible, against Trump's agenda, and you'll be watching to make sure they do the same. This could be your first action.
- » Select someone who will be the lead coordinator for the action. For the first action, this may be you! But in the future, you may want to designate a group member as the lead on each action. This person will ensure that everything runs smoothly the day of your event. You may also want a media spokesperson for each action.

- » Sign up group members to attend the next action(s). Ask a clear yes or no question: will you attend our visit to Congressman Bob's office at 3pm on Tuesday, January 10th? Write down everyone's name who volunteers. If many people don't, ask the group why and try to solve the problem. Your group will only have an impact through action.
- » Make sure you have everyone's contact information so that you can follow up with a reminder the day before the action.

AFTER THE MEETING

- » Send a message thanking everyone for attending. Remind them about the upcoming action.
- » Ask group members to recruit additional people to join your group. If each member found one more person to join you would immediately double the size of your group!



DIVERSITY AND ADVOCACY

As you conduct outreach and expand, keep in mind that we're all stronger if we represent a diverse set of voices and perspectives, and especially when we center the voices of those who are most affected by Trump's agenda. So please make a conscious effort to reach out to a diverse group of people as you build out your group. Women, members of immigrant, Muslim, African American, Latinx, and LGBTQ communities, as well as people of different incomes and education levels, health and disability statuses, and ages, are some examples of those whose engagement and leadership are especially valuable and needed in this work. This can also be particularly meaningful for those of us who identify across these categories. Resistance needs solidarity to succeed.

KEEPING YOUR LOCAL GROUP MEETING ON TRACK

Running a great local group meeting takes skill and experience, but there are a few general rules you can use to help make it a success.

- » **Prepare!** Get an agenda ready; think about what you're going to say and how you want group members to participate. Try to start on time, move efficiently through your agenda, and end on time.
- » **The parking lot.** People may bring up lots of things—including good ideas—that are not related to what's on the agenda. If something off topic is raised, ask if you can put it in the parking lot and come back to it later.
- » **Aim for balance.** If some group members don't have much to say, try to ask questions to help them participate. If someone has been talking a lot, consider asking them to hold tight so the group can hear from everyone. Be mindful of power dynamics that might make it more difficult for some people to speak up.

Thinking through questions ahead of time. Part of having a successful meeting and developing an effective local advocacy strategy is being prepared to answer tough questions and keep your meeting on track. Here are some questions people might ask and some potential answers, but remember: this is your group and it's up to you and your fellow group members to decide how you want to run it and what you want to do.

WHAT IS OUR PLAN? WHY HAVEN'T WE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTION OR THAT RALLY?

There are a number of very important protests and actions happening on different topics around the country this month, from the healthcare rallies on the 15th to the Women's March. There's no need to confine your activism to just one kind of advocacy, or one kind of event.

That said, the most important thing about being effective as a local group is making your advocacy a habit. Your voice in your district will grow each time you show up. **That's the key to success: keep showing up.** If your group visited your Members' offices a couple of times per month this year, you'd be one of the most vocal, active groups in the country, and you'd fundamentally change your relationship with your representatives.

So look around for coordinated actions other groups are planning and join them if you like how they sound. Find phone scripts for calling your representatives online. Come up with creative ideas for your office visits—Get Well Soon cards for an always-absent congressperson, maybe. If you do those things you'll keep your advocacy fun and engaging, and you'll stick with the habit, which is what really matters. It's like an exercise regime: the exercise of democracy.

WHY ARE WE WORKING ON LOCAL, DEFENSIVE CONGRESSIONAL ADVOCACY?

One of the things we've learned from studying the Tea Party and from our own experience is that **local, defensive congressional advocacy has a powerful impact.**

When you're doing congressional advocacy, the best way to maximize your leverage is by focusing on what's happening right now in Congress. If you talk to your Senator about something that they won't vote on for another six months, they'll say what you want to hear and then never back it up. If twenty of their constituents ask them tough questions about a vote happening today, it could affect the result.

All of us at Indivisible care deeply about a wide range of progressive issues, so we'd never say that defensive congressional advocacy is the only activity your group should be doing. There's lots of important work to be done on the local, city, and state level, as well as on different issues, and it's all critical to building a progressive future for this country. But we do believe that the Indivisible strategy of focusing on your own Members of Congress and what they are doing right now, is the highest-value way to lobby your representatives—which makes it a strong defense against the Trump agenda.

THANKS FOR COMING! PLEASE SIGN IN BELOW.

NAME	PHONE	EMAIL	WILL YOU ATTEND _____ ON _____ DAY?
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MAKING YOUR CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OFFICE VISIT SUCCESSFUL

OK. You're ready to take action to stop the Trump agenda, and you've found others who are ready to act with you. Now it's time to channel that energy towards making your Members of Congress (MoCs) listen.

The first step to getting started is planning your first action. We recommend starting with a visit to one of your Member of Congress' local district offices. Below, we've put together a quick cheat sheet on how to make your first district office visit a success. For more details, check out [Chapter 4 of the Indivisible Guide](#) which covers how to keep tabs on your MoCs, how to conduct office visits in more detail, and other actions you can take.

We hope this is helpful, and if anything is unclear, please send other questions via Twitter ([@indivisibleteam](#)) or by email (indivisibleagainstrump@gmail.com).

PLANNING YOUR FIRST DISTRICT OFFICE VISIT

Why visit a district office? Because these visits work.

As we discuss in the Indivisible Guide, every MoC has one or more local offices, but constituents very rarely visit them. The Tea Party understood this, and they knew they could make their voice heard by going in person to those offices, often unannounced. This seems simple, but it can have an enormous impact—the whole congressional staff will be talking about that group that showed up and demanded answers about Trump's agenda. It also demonstrates to them that you, their constituents, care very much about the issue you've come in to speak about and that you'll be watching what they do going forward.

1. Planning a district office visit.

- » **Find the right office.** Every MoC lists the physical addresses of their district offices on their public website. You may have to poke around a bit, but it's there. If you can't find it, just give them a call and ask—the staff will be happy to tell you locations and hours.
- » **Pick a day to go before inauguration.** It's important to let your Members of Congress know that you'll be watching whether they stand up to Trump's racist, corrupt, sexist, and authoritarian agenda before he takes office on Friday, January 20th. So choose either Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday next week, January 17th-19th for your office visit date. Pick a day and time between 9-5 when as many of the members of your group can participate as possible—for example, at the beginning of the day or during lunch hour.
- » **Don't let "by appointment only" cramp your style.** If your congressional office is listed as being open "by appointment only", you can either call ahead to make one, or you can try just showing up. If you decide to just show up, be ready if the office is closed—*plan a creative action your group can take a video of, or take a picture of the closed office and post it to social media.*

2. Decide your “ask” and make it relevant.

Congressional staff regularly take meetings with folks who want to talk about stuff that’s happening next month or next year. But a typical staffer can’t see much beyond today let alone beyond the next couple weeks. To make your visit count, focus on what Congress is working on now. This changes constantly, but here are two of the big issues in front of Congress as of this writing that you may choose to bring up:

- » **Trump’s Nominees.** Your senators will be voting on whether to confirm [Trump’s corrupt, racist, and sexist cabinet nominees](#). Each is awful in his/her own way, and you should let your Senators know that you expect them to oppose their confirmation. *Note that since confirmations occur in the Senate—not the House—you should focus on your two senators to express opposition to cabinet nominees.*
- » **ACA Repeal.** Over the next several weeks there will be a number of procedural votes necessary for repeal of key parts of the ACA—also known as the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare. Each is important. But we can win this fight. Repeal would mean 30 million people losing their healthcare coverage. Republicans have no replacement plan and a growing number of them are now expressing doubts about repealing the law. *Both of your senators as well as your representative will vote on repealing the ACA and you should visit all three.*

3. Decide who you want to speak with and who from your group will talk.

Your MoC likely won’t be in the local office, although you never know. The best person on his or her staff to meet with is the District/Office Director. You should first ask to meet with the MoC directly, and only accept a meeting with the District Director if the MoC is unavailable. They may try to get rid of you—don’t take “no” for an answer. If you show up in a group, they will be more likely to see you. Don’t let them pawn you off to an intern—they will try.

Assign speaking roles within your group so that individuals are prepared to cover the points they want to cover ahead of time. If you’re focusing on an issue that personally affects members of your group, then prioritize having them speak (if they are comfortable talking about it).

4. Prepare talking points so that you have a plan for what to say.

Here are some ideas for talking points to help you have an effective office visit.

- » **Establish your legitimacy.** Introduce yourselves and your group. Identify yourselves as constituents and talk about where in the district or state you live.

- » **Say what you stand for.** For example, you could say that you are standing indivisible against the corruption, authoritarianism, sexism, and racism of the new administration.
- » **Focus on one issue.** Right now, the repeal of the Affordable Care Act is one of the primary issues before Congress. You could say something like this:

“We are very concerned that Republicans are trying to dismantle the Affordable Care Act, leaving 30 million Americans without access to health care. Where does the representative/senator stand on this issue? What is s/he doing to stop this from happening?”

- » **Tell your stories.** If this issue would affect you, your family, or your friends and neighbors, talk about how and why.
- » **Don’t settle for non-answers.** If congressional staff are dodging your question—if they say they have to check back and respond to you—be polite but firm. For example, you might say “I’m disappointed that Senator Myers hasn’t taken a position on this—health care coverage for 30 million people is a serious matter. We’ll be watching to see when he takes a position, and we’ll be back to let him know how we feel about it at that point.”
- » **Close the meeting by planting your flag in the office.** Not literally! But your MoC works for you. Say you will be coming back regularly to make sure the MoC is listening to you and representing his or her constituents. Get the contact information of everybody you talk to, and send a follow up email after.
- » **Record it or it didn’t happen.** Get a picture of your group at the office. Even better yet, get a video of your group before, during, and/or after. See the media cheat sheet for more details on how to do it and why it’s so important. Bottom line, your voice will be louder and better heard if you get documented evidence. If you’d like us to help amplify, send your media to stories.indivisible@gmail.com. Include these 3 pieces of info in that email:

- » Short description of photo/video
- » Name of group w/ applicable links to social or web
- » Names of people in the video/picture

MEDIA: PREPARING TO MAKE NEWS

GETTING MEDIA-READY

- » **Following your Member of Congress:** Chapter 4 of the Indivisible Guide begins with some ways to monitor your Member of Congress (MoC) in the news. Appoint a team member to be your news monitoring lead, and have them take these steps and help make sure the rest of the group is informed. Google Alerts can be especially helpful. Go to alerts.google.com and enter your MoC's name (e.g. "Rep. Sara Smith") and your email address, and follow the steps to confirm the alert by email.
- » **Your MoC and Trump:** See if you can find favorable public statements your Member of Congress has made about Trump in the past. Save them in one place in case you want to reference these later. This list of campaign endorsements may be a good starting place: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Donald_Trump_presidential_campaign_endorsements,_2016
- » **Get familiar with local reporters:** As news stories come out, keep an eye out for the local newspaper reporters that write about your Member of Congress the most. Twitter is an excellent tool for finding and communication/building a relationship with reporters.
- » **Start building a basic media list:** A media list is your contact list of the emails and phone numbers of the media that cover your area. Someone in your group may already have one handy from a past project. If not, you can start building one now.
 - » Look up the main phone numbers of your four local TV stations (ABC, NBC, CBS and FOX); news radio stations (NPR, maybe others); and the main newspapers in your area, big and small.
 - » Call the main phone number, ask for the news room, and ask them for the main email addresses to send "media advisories" to. Add those emails to your list.
 - » Start adding specific reporters' names as you meet them at events or follow them in the paper.

IF THERE ARE NO VIDEO OR PICTURES, IT DIDN'T HAPPEN.

- » **Always always always get a video or picture of your action:** Whether this is a local group meeting or a visit to your Member's office, the way to show Congress that you're taking action is to literally show them. Capturing your own video and photos and then sharing them with media is the single best thing you can do to amplify your voice. **If you want help amplifying, send your videos/pics and your stories to stories.indivisible@gmail.com.** Include these 3 pieces of info in that email:

- » Short description of photo/video
- » Name of group w/ applicable links to social or web
- » Names of people in the video/picture
- » **Technical tips:** Smart phone cameras work just fine for these purposes. Hold your camera **horizontally**. Don't forget to come with a full battery and some storage space. Higher-res is always better. Try to keep your videos short and sweet—we love your 5 minute videos, but others may not watch the whole thing.
- » **At an event or town hall:** Appoint a member of your group to be the documentarian for the day. Think ahead and have your documentarian find a good spot to see both a question asker and the Member of Congress.
- » **Visiting a congressional office:** Take photos of your group on your way to the office that highlight your group's size. Take selfies next to signage and doorways that show where you are. Filming video while you are entering an office can feel aggressive, and the office may have a policy against it. Instead, we'd recommend filming a "selfie" video just afterwards, describing how the visit went in a few sentences.

GETTING MEDIA ATTENTION

We recommend that groups appoint a single media lead to be the clearinghouse for interactions with press, particularly over email. Many different people may serve as "spokespeople" on different days, but having one logistical point of contact for press is a best practice we definitely recommend. If others hear from reporters directly, they should let the media lead know before speaking with them.

When it comes to interacting with media, as with all parts of taking action, trust your instincts. If the political environment where you live makes any of these steps uncomfortable, go slow and try things out.

- » **Getting media to an event:**
 - » The day before your event if possible, or the morning of—send your media list an email (BCCed) with the basic information about what's happening. This email is called a "media advisory." You can look up formal templates online if it suits your group's style. The main thing is to communicate the who, what, when, where and why. Give your media lead's cell phone number and mention how many people from your group will be there.

- » Ahead of the event, also Tweet at the local reporters who are active on Twitter and cover your area—let them know what’s happening and that you’ll have video/pictures if they’re interested. Twitter is a secret weapon here—a great way to connect directly with the journalists.
- » The morning of: TV stations generally have a meeting around 9am to decide where they will be sending cameras for the day. Call them around 8:30am if possible. Ask for the “assignment desk.” Double check that they received your email, and make sure they have all the details they need before that meeting.
- » **Getting coverage without getting media there:** You should also email photos and videos to your media list after an event has happened. Summarize the facts of what happened and give the contact info of someone who can answer questions. Ideally, send this out within an hour or two of the event happening.

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

Different members of your group may be the best choice to speak with reporters on different days. Depending on the issue, an older person or a younger person, a veteran, a member of a marginalized group targeted by the Trump administration, or a person impacted by the ACA might be the best “spokesperson” for the day. There’s no need to be perfectly polished. “Indivisible” is all about regular local people taking action locally. The most impactful thing you can do is be yourself and bring your own style! Here are some tips as you think ahead.

- » Keep it local: if you have a chance, drop in the names of towns your group hails from or specific locations relevant to the issue. That localizes your impact and makes it extra hard for your MoC and their allies to dismiss you as outsiders.
- » Think about one sentence you’d like to say and just practice saying it a couple times.
- » Unless you are recording a live interview, it’s usually OK to pause and restate something if you find yourself tongue-tied. Ask the reporter about this before the interview begins. Chances are they are not trying to “gotcha” you. You are working together to create a nice, short interview’s worth of forage for their story.
- » ...That said, always assume that if you say something on camera, it can be used later, and if you write it in an email, it could be published. So keep off-color comments and other distractions to yourself, even if it seems like the interview is over.

#STANDINDIVISIBLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Every movement needs a hashtag. #standindivisible is ours. Take a selfie and tell us why you stand with your friends, neighbors, and colleagues to resist the Trump agenda. When your local group meets and takes action, share your #standindivisible stories, videos, and photos. Other groups around the country are excited to see each other in action, so feel free to show a little local pride with photos that highlight your part of the world. You can tag us on [Twitter @IndivisibleTeam](#) or on [Facebook: IndivisibleGuide](#).

NATIONAL MEDIA

Reporters at national media outlets may reach out to us with questions about groups around the country. We'd love to put them in touch with those who are interested. We will always reach out to you first. Likewise, if you hear from a national reporter unexpectedly, feel free to reach out to us with any questions at press.indivisible@gmail.com.

If a situation comes up where a local or national reporter's behavior raises concerns, please also feel free to let us know at press.indivisible@gmail.com. We will do our best to get back with ideas, but again, we trust your judgement and urge you to do what's best for your group.

Our goal is to give local groups effective tools to do local advocacy themselves, and media coverage is a part of that advocacy. We can't wait to see the great stories you get!

YOUR FIRST VISIT TO YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

As the Guide suggests, there are several different ways that you can get your message in front of your Member of Congress effectively. A visit to your Member of Congress's office is a good first action. If this is your first visit, here are some tips to keep in mind:

- » **Introduce your group:** Say where you're from and what your core values are, and introduce everyone in the group.

- » **Raise one issue to focus on.** For example, you might choose to talk about the Affordable Care Act. You could say something like:

"We are very concerned that Congress is taking steps to repeal the Affordable Care Act without having a replacement plan—that could take health care coverage away from up to 30 million Americans. Where does Representative Bill stand on this issue? What would he say to residents of our community who currently get coverage under the ACA about what he's going to do?"

- » **Raise up powerful voices from your group.** Encourage those in the group that have been directly impacted by an issue to speak about their personal experiences, if they are comfortable.

- » **Be specific.** Ask specific questions about your Members of Congress’s position on an issue, and try to get clear answers. If a staffer suggest that they don’t know their boss’s position, you can politely ask whether someone in the DC office might know. You’d be happy to wait while they check. If staff continue to have no answer on an issue, you can reiterate that you will look forward to hearing more and keeping in touch.

“I’m surprised that he hasn’t taken a position on this—health care coverage for 30 million people is a serious matter. Please let us know as soon as you can what he has decided on this issue.”

- » **Be courteous and persistent.** Be honest about the things you are passionate about. Don’t be afraid to be emotional. You don’t need to be an expert and have all the answers. The most valuable thing you can do is speak as a constituent about how a bill will impact your life and what you feel based on your values.
- » **Rinse and repeat.** Make clear that you are looking forward to coming back a lot to make sure your representative is listening to you and representing his/her constituents.

WATCHING OUT FOR RIGHT-WING TRICKS

PLEASE NOTE: WE WE ARE NOT PROVIDING ANY LEGAL ADVICE, EITHER THROUGH THIS DOCUMENT OR IN GENERAL.

If you have any questions that you think require legal advice, we recommend that you identify a national legal organization with a chapter in your area, such as the National Lawyers Guild or, particularly for issues involving your constitutional rights, the American Civil Liberties Union.

Right-wing activists and media use stealthy tactics to delegitimize progressive groups, creating secret recordings of group meetings or off-the-cuff statements by their members. In 2015, anti-abortion group Live Action pretended to be a medical company, scheduled a lunch meeting with a Planned Parenthood employee, secretly recorded the conversation, and selectively edited the tape to suggest Planned Parenthood was breaking the law. In 2016, right-wing activist James O’Keefe published a heavily edited video that seemed to show Democratic Party officials discussing underhanded tactics to discredit Donald Trump.

Your group may not be the target of these tactics. And the good news is that even if you are targeted, a few tips to keep in mind can make sure you don’t get caught unaware:

1. **Remember that what you and members of your group say about what you are doing might become public.** Most states allow people to secretly record conversations or meetings with other people without their consent. This doesn’t mean you need to be paranoid about everyone recording you, it just means it’s good to make a habit of talking about what your group is doing in positive terms. You are planning local advocacy focused on your members of congress to push them to represent you and your values: that is a fundamental American right.
2. **Visible group members should be mindful of their personal online security.** If you post something on social media, under ordinary circumstances it probably won’t get much attention. If you get interviewed by your local TV station and your last post on Twitter could be interpreted negatively, someone might find it and spread it more widely, and with less context, than you want. It’s also a good practice to for you and the members of your group to try out basic privacy and personal security measures, such as privacy settings on Facebook or two-step verification on your email. Then, have a friend look briefly over the public-facing social media accounts of any visible members of your group to see if they find anything a right-wing activist could use against you.

3. **Get to know your fellow activists.** For smaller groups, many new members will come through direct referrals from members already involved, but if your group has a big profile in your area and is attracting new members you don't know previously, that's great! It's important to be mission-focused in your meetings and actions, but try to set aside time where possible for social or team-building activities between members—strong bonds between volunteers will help reinforce your commitment to action, and help you understand what priorities bring you all together.
4. **Look out for suspicious situations and leave them quickly.** Attempts to discredit your group's action can involve leading questions or inappropriate assertions by a right-wing activist that go unchallenged or are assented to by others. That's natural: none of us likes to create confrontations or be disagreeable. But if someone you don't know that well is saying or doing anything suspicious, think about how you respond and how to exit the situation. When conducting a public action such as a visit to a Member's office, discuss ahead of time who will be participating and agree on your message; if you see a participant escalating their actions or rhetoric in a way that seems disruptive, consider how you will respond as individuals or as a group.
5. **Let your own ethics and values be your guide.** You wouldn't be standing indivisible if you didn't have strong progressive values, rooted in an inclusive and respectful vision of our country. If you follow those values, it is a lot less likely that you'll accidentally say or do something you don't intend.