

Faithful Budget Grassroots Toolkit

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Tell Congress: Reject Harsh Spending Cuts and Enact a Faithful Budget

In the current political and economic climate, neither party is giving sufficient voice to the needs of the families who have been pushed to the margins. We view the budget as a moral document, outlining the values and priorities of this country. Low-income housing assistance, nutrition assistance, education, job training, reentry services, refugee resettlement, foreign assistance, and environmental protection should not be cut in order to boost Pentagon spending and further militarize our border and our immigration enforcement. The federal budget should foster hope, opportunity, and a place at the table for all, especially those experiencing hardship and oppression.

What is President Trump requesting?

President Trump's budget requests a:

- 19.8% decrease in the Department of Labor
- 29.1% decrease in the Department of State and International Aid
- 3.8% decrease in the department of Justice
- 13.2% decrease in the Department of Housing and Urban Development
- 13.5% decrease in the Department of Education
- 31.4% decrease in the Environmental Protection Agency
- 12.7% decrease in the Department of Transportation
- 6.8% increase in the Department of Homeland Security
- 10.1% increase in the Department of Defense

As can be seen, invaluable programs face disproportionate scrutiny when it comes to budget cuts. Instead of cutting programs that are so critical to the basic wellbeing of millions of Americans, we urge Congress to invest in those programs that provide economic security and opportunity for people across the country and that lead to a safer, more secure, and sustainable world.

[Click Here to see the 66 Programs that Trump's Budget would Cut.](#)

Take Action: Make Sure Your Members of Congress Hear from You

Congress is preparing for critical budget decisions that will take place this fall, budget decisions that have to pass both the House and the Senate. Members of Congress need to hear from concerned constituents throughout the summer in order to stand strong against cuts to crucial programs. You can:

1. **Attend town halls and public events** with your Members of Congress to make your voice heard
2. **Call and tweet your Members of Congress** and request visits from their local offices
3. **Write** an opinion editorial or letter to the editor to your local media outlets in support of funding that protects critical programs.

4. **Host a vigil, rally, or public event** that opposes cuts to critical departments and programs.
5. **Meet** with your Member of Congress over August recess

Attend Town Halls & Local Public Events

Town halls and local public events that your members of Congress host when they are home are a great opportunity to hear directly from your member of Congress, and for them to hear from you! Here are some tips to help you make the most of it.

Asking Questions at Town Halls:

Introduce yourself.

Include your name, your city, and your state. You may also want to say how long you've lived in the area or your profession.

Thank your member for being there.

It's especially important when the town hall might be tense—it makes them much more receptive to your question.

Tell a brief story.

Make sure the congressperson understands that this is personal to their district.

Make a clear, direct ask.

Make it as hard as possible for them to avoid the question, and get them on the record agreeing to take a concrete action.

Here's an example of what to ask:

- "President Trump's budget request called for a 66% increase in immigrant detention. Can I count on you to push back and push for a reduction in all immigrant detention?"
- "President Trump's budget slashes funding for Meals on Wheels, low-income housing assistance, and critical services that help low-income families make ends meet. What will you do protect funding for these programs?"

Follow up!

Get staff contact information while you're there, and reach out to make sure the member knows you will be watching to make sure they follow through.

Tips:

- Get there early.
- Practice your introduction, story, and question. In many cases, you'll have two minutes or less to speak.

[**Find a town hall or public event near you.**](#)

Call and Tweet Your Members of Congress & Request Visits from their Local Offices

TELL CONGRESS: Pass a faithful budget that robustly funds programs that effectively reduce poverty and provide opportunity in the U.S. and around the world while exercising proper care of the earth.

Background:

CALL YOUR SENATORS & REPRESENTATIVES TODAY: 1-866-961-4293

Please call 3 times to connect with your Representative and both of your Senators

Sample Script: "I'm your constituent from [CITY/TOWN], and I urge you to protect critical programs from the cuts proposed in Trump's budget request. We view the budget as a moral document, outlining the values and priorities of this country. The federal budget should be a budget that fosters hope, opportunity, and a place at the table for all, especially those experiencing hardship and oppression. Low-income housing assistance, nutrition assistance, education, job training, reentry services, refugee resettlement, foreign assistance, and environmental protection should not be cut in order to boost Pentagon spending, further militarize our border and our immigration enforcement. I urge you to instead reduce Pentagon spending, efforts to further militarize our police and our immigration enforcement, which tear families and communities apart. I urge you to reflect the best of our American values of compassion, opportunity, and the common good."

Feel free to share a personal story about how some critical programs have helped you and your community. Pick out a particular program or priorities to highlight.

How to Request Visits with your Members' Local Offices:

To schedule a congressional advocacy visit in-district, you need to reach out to your member of Congress' scheduler. Call their D.C. office to find out who that is; you can find the contact information for all of your congressional offices at fcnl.org/congress.

Once you have the contact information of the scheduler, send them an email. Here's a sample- make sure to edit the parts in italics to be about you and your group.

Sample Meeting Request

Dear *Scheduler*,

I am writing to request a visit with **Rep./Sen. Name** in-district during the week of August 14-31 at their **closest to you** office to discuss the budget decisions before Congress.

A group of constituents, representing **affiliations of group members** would like to meet with the **Representative/Senator** to talk about the impact these funding decisions will have on our community.

Please let me know as soon as you can about **Rep./Sen. Name's** availability August 14-31. Thank you for your time and attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Name

profession

Religious community/organizations/affiliation if applicable

City, State, Zip Code

List of other Delegation Members

Please only make one visit request per group. You don't want the scheduler to get confused or overwhelmed!

See page 9 of this toolkit to learn more about building a team for an in-district congressional visit.

[For a video with a step-by-step tutorial of how to schedule an in-district advocacy visit click here!](#)

Write Opinion Editorials & Letters to the Editor for Local Media Outlets

Publishing opinion editorials (op-eds) and letters to the editor (LTEs) are 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.

How to Engage the Media:

- **Respond to Recent Reports**

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

- **Ask for Action**

Make a specific ask to specific policymakers. Mentioning your Members of Congress by name is an important way to make sure they see it.

- **Find the Facts**

Illustrate your argument with one or two facts with citations. Statistics can be helpful in moderation, but too many statistics can be confusing.

- **Tie It Together**

Bring in your personal connection or moral approach to the issue. State your connections to the community as they are relevant to the points you're making.

Tips for Submitting Op-Eds or LTEs:

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 can't find a limit, keep it to 150 words or fewer for LTEs or 750 words or fewer for op-eds.

Write from your own voice: Your piece is more likely to be 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.

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. To find local newspapers and submit your piece, visit: <http://act.fcni.org/lte/lte/>.

Report Back: If you're published, let us know so we can track the impact. Also, make sure to call and email your Members of Congress to continue the conversation.

Build Your Advocacy Team

Start Planning your In District Visit:

When Members of Congress know that their constituents care about these critical programs, they vote accordingly. Establishing and nurturing relationships with your Senators and Representatives is crucial to enacting policies that protect our society, and also to stopping proposals - like President Trump's budget proposal.

Every Senator and Representative has an office – often multiple offices – in their home state. They work from these local offices during "congressional recess," making it convenient for your voice to be heard. **They will be home the entire month of August, and it's important to request visits with the Member of Congress early!** During recess you may even be able to meet with your Member of Congress in person.

Get a team together: A team ideally includes faith leaders from different traditions, people whose lives have been directly impacted by these critical programs. Be strategic in finding team members and community leaders who best represent your community's call for just immigration policies that foster welcoming communities and whom the Member may already know or respect. Your team should commit to building an ongoing relationship with the office. Aim for 5-10 participants, though a larger group can be a powerful sign of support. Check with the scheduler to see how many people their office can accommodate and be sure to plan well, so that you are focused on your message and everyone knows their specific roles.

Learn about who represents your community in Congress: Go to www.house.gov and www.senate.gov to find out which Members of Congress represent you and your surrounding community. Their websites and a "Google" search will show how they have voted before and what they have said about the federal budget, spending priorities, as well as biographical sketches, campaign statements, past occupations, religion, political and social memberships, areas of interest and positions on other issues, all of which can inform your approach to the meeting.

Have a plan: Meet with the other participants to assign roles, including the facilitator, the personal story, specific points, and the "ask." Practice by role-playing before the meeting so that everyone feels comfortable and knows what to do. Review your talking points and prepare your materials. In order to show the broad support of faith communities, consider bringing the Faithful Budget, including the Preamble, which outlines the budget priorities that would foster the country and society we envision. You may also want to include other materials, such as media clips of local events and fact sheets showing the faith community's support for budget policies.

Roles:

The Facilitator will kick off the meeting by introducing the group, explaining the purpose for the meeting, and providing space for each person to briefly introduce themselves. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.

The Personal Story is key to every meeting. Sharing how these programs and how these issues directly impact you and your community are critical. Telling these stories will show how people's lives are impacted and how your community would be harmed by the proposed budget cuts.

The Ask is the critical part of the visit when you ask for the Member of Congress to support specific programs and defend against spending cuts. Listen carefully and ask for clarification if what they say is vague.

Schedule a meeting: Call your Member's local office to request a meeting (local office numbers can be found on their websites). Make sure to tell them how many other faith leaders and community members would like to attend. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with staff who work on budget and appropriations issues. You may have to send an email or fill out a form. Don't be discouraged if you need to follow-up for a response.

Host Interfaith Vigils

Don't forget to invite your Member of Congress!

Host an Interfaith Vigil

Hosting interfaith vigils provides the opportunity for faith leaders to express how our country's budget decisions are moral decisions, shared across faith traditions, reflecting on the deep scriptural and spiritual roots of our work to support poor and vulnerable populations, care for the sick, welcome the stranger, and promote peace. Even small events, multiplied across the country, will send a powerful message to the Administration and Congress that the budget is moral document that is important to people of faith and conscience.

Steps to a successful prayer vigil:

- Coordinate a public prayer vigil with faith leaders, local agencies and service providers, community members, and if possible local elected leaders.
- Identify the core leaders and speakers, make sure there are impacted people who are invited to help plan and speak at the event.
- Consider inviting elected officials including Representatives, Senators, City Council Members, or the Mayor.
- Be clear about your goals, what you want to accomplish, and how many people you hope will join the event.
- Identify the best location for the vigil, which is generally somewhere central in a symbolic memorial, state capitol, park or city hall. We are encouraging all to have the vigil be at or near the member of Congress' local office.
- Apply for any permits needed for the location; reserve or order any equipment you'll need such as microphones, cameras, banners, candles, projectors; and make sure you can access electrical outlets.
- Choose a time of day best for attendance and media -- most news reports take place at 5-6 PM and 9-10 PM, so a few hours before those time blocks is best for press events.
- Promote the event through social media, public service announcement, flyers, websites, and congregation bulletins.
- Agree on messaging and talking points.
- Bring signs that are consistent with your messaging and agreed upon ahead of time
- Assign specific talking points to each speaker and ensure they have time limits.
- Invite the media by issuing a media advisory and following up with a press release after the event.
- Invite participants at the vigil to be part of further action and advocacy by writing and calling their Representatives and Senators.
- If you are able to get a wide range of organizations together, you could hold a 24 or 48 hour vigil outside the office of your Senator or Representative. Create a spreadsheet to sign up each organization with 2 hour blocks of time.

The set-up for the vigil should ensure that all faiths are respected and welcomed with awareness and consciousness. Drawing on the faith traditions and rituals can make vigils much more powerful, raising the creative and dramatic tension.

- Ask clergy attending to wear collars, stoles, robes and any other appropriate religious attire.
- Foot-washing of individuals impacted.

- Procession with candles to symbolic location.
- A Prayer Wall with handwritten prayers.
- Lift up stories in sacred texts.
- Highlight passages in scripture and present to Members of Congress.
- Collect and deliver prayers to your Senators and Representatives.
- Make visuals – photos, drawings, art, etc., that show the consequences of the proposed budget policies.
- If you want to do a 24 or 48 hour vigil make a signup sheet and assign 2 hour time slots to each organization involved.

Sample Vigil Program:

Welcome—a few words about the focus and purpose of your vigil. Why now? What’s the concern? Who’s affected? How can this vigil convince your members of Congress to support a faithful budget? What values shape your faith traditions’ response to these budget concerns? This may take the form of brief comments from one of your speakers, or a welcome and an opening prayer.

Music- Invite local musicians who share similar values to join your vigil, you can have them do one or two songs throughout the program. Choose songs that are connected to the cause, or songs that everyone knows and can sing along.

Opening Prayer—Ask clergy or key lay leader to open with a prayer Song—A singer, choir or instrumentalist can perform, or a few singers can lead participants in singing. Reading—for ideas see suggested readings below.

Speaker—A personal story from a local community member of how the proposed budget cuts would impact families and communities. More than one story can be integrated throughout the program as well. Creative Ritual: Integrate creative symbols or rituals from faith traditions that draw more attention to the importance of a faithful budget (see above suggestions)

Prayer—One person may lead the prayers, or you might invite several faith leaders to pray according to their traditions. Involve vigil participants in praying a refrain throughout your prayer time, or pray in a circle so everyone has the opportunity to pray. Consider offering prayers in multiple languages.

Song & Closing—reiterate the focus and purpose of your vigil, and send participants off with a call to raise their voices in the public sphere to stop immoral budget cuts and push for a faithful budget. Consider a procession or march to another symbolic and strategic location.

Sample Invite to Your Member of Congress:

Dear Honorable Senator / Representative,

Thank you for your support over the years to invest in key priorities, such as . . . [education, low-income housing assistance, job training, reentry services, refugee resettlement, foreign assistance, environmental protection, etc].

We would like to invite you to attend [ORGANIZATION/ COALITION]'s prayer vigil/ press conference on [DATE] at [LOCATION] along with faith leaders and civic leaders who are speaking out against immoral budget cuts and the need for a Faithful Budget.

We would be honored to have presence as a speaker at this press conference/ vigil. Other speakers include [list 2-3 top speakers] Please let us know as soon as you can if you are able to attend by contacting me at [email]. If you are able to be there we will connect about the details on messaging and agenda.

Sincerely,

Spreading the Word on Welcome: Media Resources

If you have planned an event such as a dinner, panel discussion, project, interfaith vigil, or weekly service, we encourage you to reach out and invite members of the media. Look online at the local publications or outlets you would like in attendance and search for past articles on federal spending or fiscal policy, then consider pitching your event to reporters who frequently cover those issues or other community issues if there is not a designated budget reporter.

Consider inviting the editorial director at your local newspaper. By inviting members of the press, you will be able to further share our message of welcoming to a larger audience and also inspire local media to cover federal spending issues more frequently in a positive way that highlights broad community support for the programs you wish to highlight.

To invite multiple members of the press, send a media advisory at least two full business days ahead of the event. Ideally, send the media advisory one week before the event and then again the day before your event.

Please see the draft pitch email for media invitation, as well as the media advisory below.

Draft Pitch Email for Media Invitation and Follow Up from Advisory

Hello,

I hope you are well! I wanted to let you know of a potential story opportunity in regards to the continued debate over the federal budget, proposed spending cuts, and the ongoing response from communities in CITY/STATE. On DATE, ORGANIZATION will host a vigil about the need for a Faithful Budget.

In light of the continued and heated political debate over the federal budget decisions before Congress, and the ongoing discussions about proposed spending cuts to critical services while large increases to the Pentagon and increased immigration enforcement, we would like to highlight the human stories behind these policies and impact they will have on our community. Given your past articles highlighting these issues, I would love to offer you an exclusive interview with the group next DATE if you are interested!

I have attached the invitation flyer to this email with a full list of individuals in the group, but please let me know if you are interested or if you have any questions!

Sincerely,

Draft Media Advisory

DATE

For Immediate Release

Contact:

NAME, PHONE NUMBER

*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

Date of Event, Time, Location

Local (Faith Groups/Community Groups) Hosts (Vigil/Rally/Event) for a Faithful Budget in (Name of Town)

Your City Name, State Abbreviation – As the (City/Town Name) community responds to President Trump’s proposed budget and the big upcoming budget decisions before Congress, leaders from (Organization/Congregation) will host (event type) to show support for a Faithful Budget that promotes the values of our country and faith traditions. They will be joined by (list other special guests, especially clergy or elected officials). Participants will discuss how (specific programs) impact the community, and our hope that Congress will enact budget decisions that support economic security and opportunity for all. All participants will be available for interviews before and after the event.

WHAT: Event type with faith and community leaders to oppose harsh budget cuts and promote a Faithful Budget

WHERE: Address of event

WHEN: Date and time of event

SPEAKERS: List of all speakers and their titles

DETAILS: Add event details such as security (if applicable), special visuals (religious symbols, art pieces, etc.), or any other important event information.

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Advocacy Visits with Your Members of Congress in their Local Offices

During the Visit:

Introductions

The Facilitator should start the meeting by thanking the Member for their time, introducing the group as a whole, and then having each person introduce themselves. Each participant should say the faith community they represent to show the power of the group.

Personal Story

Someone should share a story about why Members of Congress should oppose harsh budget cuts and support a faithful budget that invests in low-income housing, education, job training, reentry services, refugee resettlement, foreign assistance, and environmental protection while reducing Pentagon spending.

Make the Ask

We believe the federal budget is a moral document, outlining the priorities of our country. Can we count on you to promote a faithful budget that invests in key priorities such as . . . (education, low-income housing assistance, nutrition assistance, job training, reentry services, refugee resettlement, foreign assistance, and environmental protection). We urge you to protect these programs from sequestration cuts.

When they answer, listen well and take notes. While they may not agree with you on all these issues, try to find common ground to continue to work together on. You'll likely not convince them to change their mind in one meeting, but you can intentionally build a relationship that can transform their perspective and stance. Much of advocacy involves listening, and providing opportunities for the member to share their priorities and concerns and ask questions. Look for indications of the members' views, and finding opportunities to provide helpful information or correct misinformation. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard instead of only being talked at. Ask questions and engage in conversation. Answer questions honestly. If you don't know the answer, say that you don't know but you will find out. Assign one person in the group to follow up.

Thank You & Invitation

Thank them and invite them to an upcoming prayer vigil, service, or event you are planning. Offer to be a resource to them, and remember to get the staffers' business cards. Consider asking them to take a photo with your group – most politicians love the photo opportunity!

After the Visit:

Debrief the Meeting

It's important to make sure you and your group are on the same page immediately after leaving the meeting, while the conversation is fresh in your mind. Make sure to leave the office building, so your debrief conversation won't be overheard. As a group, review: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? It's also important to evaluate your group's work. How did we do as a team? Share the information learned during your meeting with your state coalition, immigrants' rights groups, and other allies.

Follow Up with your Member of Congress

Choose one person to send a follow up email thanking the Member or staff for their time, attaching the documents mentioned, providing answers to questions that came up during the meeting, and continuing to engage the Member and staff in your group's work. You can once again make your case against proposed budget cuts and support for a faithful budget, and inviting them to an upcoming event.

Call Washington, DC

The local and Washington, DC offices may not communicate about visits, so it's important to follow up with the DC office as well. The Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121 can connect you to the DC offices of your Senators and Representative. Introduce yourself as a constituent and ask for the staffer who works on appropriations. Tell them about your meeting with their local office, and ask what they are doing to oppose harmful budget cuts and support a faithful budget.

Tell Us How Your Visit Went!

It's very important for us know about where members stand on the budget decisions before Congress. After you meet or speak with someone from your Member's local and/or DC offices, please follow up with us. Advocates in DC can then follow up with the DC staff to reinforce your visit and answer any specific questions about legislative proposals. We will also share with you what we are hearing from their DC staff.