

Congressional Background Research: Using the Champion Scale

Members of Congress have various motivations for making decisions on any law or policy. Motivations include their political party, religion, family ties, constituent pressure, and pressure from those who fund their campaigns. As community organizers, we have the ability to exert the most influence on constituent pressure and pressure from funders who believe in our cause.

But in order to work on building or using this power, we need to understand where our member of Congress stands on the issues that we're advocating. Figuring out what level of support they have for our stances, what pressures exist to push them to work for or against our cause, and how likely they are to lead new initiatives will help us to create and derive our strategy for getting the support we need to make a real change in Global Health policy.

To do this work, we often refer to the Champion Scale, adapted from our friends at [RESULTS](#).

Members of Congress don't often come into office as champions of global health equity - our goal is to move them step by step towards the top of our champion scale so they can become **champions** of global health equity:



4 Champion

Champions: These folks author legislation or sign on letters, they work with Congress to get bills, laws, and funding passed to make progress on global health equity.

3 Leaders

Leaders: We can count on these members to introduce amendments, generate support, work with Congressional leadership and/or sit on relevant committees or caucuses. They don't prioritize global health as much as champions, but they're really important.

2 Advocate

Advocate: These members encourage their colleagues to support legislation, they sign on to support letters (sometimes without our prompting), and encourage their colleagues to sign on as well. Importantly, they might not see global health as a priority at all, but they know some of their constituents are interested/care about the issues.

1 Supporter

Supporter: These members are on board to vote for legislation when it comes onto the floor of their chamber. They show basic levels of support in press releases.

0 Neutral or Uninformed

Neutral/Uninformed: These folks don't yet put stock on global health issues, legislation, or funding. They may have never been asked by constituents before, or they may need some persuading. Usually they're uncertain why they should care about a given issue.

-1 Opposed

Opposed: These members actually believe the policy is a bad one. These don't emerge all that often in opposition to global health, but can when funding is a part of our request.

Once we answer a few questions about our member of Congress, we can place them on this champion scale.

1. The first question to answer about your member of Congress is: **do they already have a position on the legislation you're advocating for?** The easiest way to track this is on www.Congress.gov. There you can search for the member of Congress directly, or by using your address - and you can search for the bill in question. We suggest using the bill number for your search, in order to get a direct result.
2. **What standing does our Congressperson have in Congress and for what do they typically vote?** For this, we use govtrack.us. Here we can find out all sorts of interesting information about our member of Congress.
3. **Who funds our member of Congress?** Many times our member's biggest funders have a lot of influence on decisions they may make on individual bills. Those who fund our elected officials can be adversaries to our goals, or they can be allies. To figure out who contributes the most to our member's campaigns, we use opensecrets.org.
4. **What has our member been saying?** Members of Congress typically have very curated public views on their own websites, so when we want to see their views on health, foreign aid, and other key issues, we can check on votesmart.org - this site keeps a log of their public statements. press releases. kev votes.

Once you collect the basic information about your member of Congress, you should be able to tell where they fit on the champion scale and what kind of messaging might work in talking with them in a meeting. You want to ask yourself: how does my cause fit their narrative? It's our job as advocates to connect the dots.

Actions are louder than words