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**ARTS LEADERSHIP  
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# **Engaging Members of Congress ALAS 2021**

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# Engaging Members of Congress

***“As you build your strategies on engaging members of Congress, you’ll want to develop dual relationships with DC staff and district staff.” - Karmen Rossi***

## **Panelists**

*Ashanti McGee, District Representative, U.S. Representative Susie Lee (Nevada)*

*Karmen Rossi, Deputy State Director, Military and Veterans Affairs for Congresswoman Liz Cheney (Wyoming)*

*Laurel Sayer, Chief Executive Officer, Perpetua Resources (Idaho)*

## **Call to action**

- In this pandemic, consider it an obligation to tell the story of the arts and say thank you to members of Congress for their support. Your two key messages are: (i) the arts provide viable economic value in the state and need support and (ii) your gratitude for COVID funding.
- Send open invitations to members to your events (including virtual).
- Make a particular point to learn about the committees your member(s) serves on and focus on members who serve on key appropriations committees.

## **Recognizing the importance of developing working relationships with staff**

- Staff are key to effectively engaging a member of Congress.
- Staff do the scheduling and a meeting with a staff member can be invaluable to you.
- Don’t assume that staff have the same view(s) as the member.
- Staff have policy portfolios. Whoever is responsible for the arts can be particularly helpful and so can those with other portfolios.
- District staff can be instrumental in converting your issues/concerns into legislative action.
- District staff can also engage their colleagues in Washington on your behalf.

## **Understanding the ways that a Congressional office can support you**

Beyond discussing issues with you and the member’s position, a Congressional office can support you through any of the following services:

- Producing certificates and commendations
- Writing letters of support for your organization, project, or work - some call these “gold bonds”
- Attending and organizing award ceremonies
- Organizing roundtables
- Publicizing recognition of national months and local observances

- Amplifying your message on social media
- Having a member or staff attend community meetings
- Producing issue research
- Coordinating bill sponsorship and development of legislation.

#### **Dealing with objections to public funding of the arts**

- Provide members that may not be supportive of fiscal measures ways to support the arts other than supporting increased appropriations.
- Understand that there are some people that we are never going to win over.
- Focus your messaging on the arts/creative economy as economic drivers, the importance of the arts to children and young people, and the importance of arts and culture in rural communities.
- Learn more about the member and their connection to the arts (for example, their connection as a supporter of a local choir or their spouse being an active arts supporter and volunteer).
- Consider having young people write in to share the value of their experiences with the arts.

#### **Building relationships with Congressional offices - be strategic and don't give up!**

- Consider meeting with the member as a coalition. Your coalition, for example, could consist of any of the following - an arts advocacy organization, a local arts council, several arts organizations in their district, and a representative from the private sector/business community who is an advocate for the arts.
- Be prepared to speak to “arts &”, that being, arts and the economy (creative economy), arts and veterans, arts and healthcare.
- In this environment, setting up a Zoom call or an in-person meeting is possible depending on the circumstances of the office. Remember, these calls or meetings are generally about 20 minutes.
- Don't worry about being annoying, rather be willing to throw anything you think is important at staff with whom you are developing a relationship. Remember, staff are responsible for staying abreast of issues in the district and nationally.

#### **Engaging members to show public support of the arts**

- Members and even their spouses can be called upon to open arts events and support arts causes.
- Consider leveraging art and other competitions as a means of drawing attention to the arts and building connection with members of Congress. Examples include the Congressional Art Competition, a high school art competition, and Poetry Out Loud.