



PARTNERSHIP  
FOR PUBLIC SERVICE



HATTAWAY  
COMMUNICATIONS

# Renewing Trust and Hope in Congress

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

## A TRUST-BUILDING NARRATIVE

We know many good people do good work in Congress, but their stories are seldom told. Public perceptions are shaped by negative narratives people hear in the news, social media, and popular culture.

The negative narrative is painfully familiar: Congress is corrupt. It doesn't represent everyday people. It's not likely to change. There's little we, the people, can do about it.

Cognitive science says it's difficult to dislodge a cultural narrative, which is common in the culture and sounds like common sense. Simply citing facts and figures that disprove it won't work.

People tend to discount information that challenges strongly held views. To change the narrative about Congress, we must offer an alternative that speaks to both the head and the heart. And we must share stories that bring it to life.

Distrust in Congress runs deep. It will take more than messages to change the dynamic. But change is possible, if people consistently hear messages and see stories that open their eyes to the possibilities—and connect with members of Congress who live up to the principles of public service.

This toolkit will equip you to communicate in ways that can help to rebuild public trust in Congress and renew people's hope for the institution.

The purpose of this work is not simply to make people feel better about an institution many see as corrupt and dysfunctional.

Our narrative is meant to reinforce the purpose and principles that should guide Congress.

Our strategy is to share authentic stories about individuals and accurate information about the institution that reflect the purpose and principles.

Our goal is to renew trust and hope, so that more Americans will engage with Congress—and encourage members of Congress to embody the highest ideals of public service.

## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed to equip the Partnership for Public Service and our allies to communicate a consistent set of messages and produce a steady stream of stories that work together to change perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors.

This material is based on research conducted by Hattaway Communications, which specializes in communications research and development informed by linguistics, cognitive and social psychology, and other fields of social science.

You can use much of the messages verbatim. You can tailor the language to address different topics and audiences. You can also draw on the research insights and examples provided to craft stories that are both authentic and strategic.



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**Audience Insights** from communications research, which provide a framework for communicating ideas that build trust and hope. *Pages 6-17*

An **Aspirational Narrative** about the purpose and principles that should guide Congress, which reflect the aspirations and values of the American people.  
*Pages 18-19*

**Winning Words**, which you can draw on to create consistent messaging with maximum motivating power and word-of-mouth potential. *Pages 20-22*

**Strategic Stories**, which show you how to craft stories of real people in real situations that bring the ideas in our narrative to life. *Pages 23-28*

**Target Audience**, which describes an engaged audience of people who express a level of trust Congress and might be motivated and mobilized to support the cause.  
*Pages 29-30*



## METHODOLOGY

The insights, and ideas in this toolkit were developed based on an extensive research and development process.

A **Literature Review** of academic and public opinion research on attitudes toward Congress.

**In-Depth Interviews** with experts on Congress, staff of advocacy organizations that lobby Congress, journalists, and institutionalists in Congress.

A **Communications Assessment**, which examined the role of advocacy and policy organizations that communicate with the public about Congress.

A **News and Social Media Analysis**, which identified key ideas that define the discourse about Congress, and individuals and organizations driving coverage and conversation.

A **Segmentation Survey** of 2,417 U.S. adults, which mapped different public mindsets toward Congress and produced data offering fresh insights and innovative ways to engage the public.

The survey of registered voters was fielded online, in English, between January 25-February 9, 2022. Respondents closely reflected the overall demographics of the voting population across the United States. The margin of error is plus or minus 5% at a 95% confidence level.

**Winning Words Focus Groups** with voters across the country representing a diversity of demographics, political views, and perceptions of Congress. Focus groups were held in March 2022.

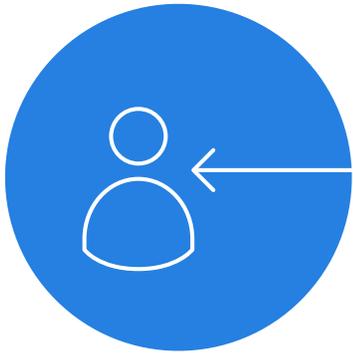
A **Messenger Audit** of potential champions, to spark ideas on how the Partnership can equip them to be a powerful messenger of the new narrative.

**Workshops** with Partnership staff and members of the Fix Congress cohort, who offered valuable input and ideas for messages, stories, and strategies.



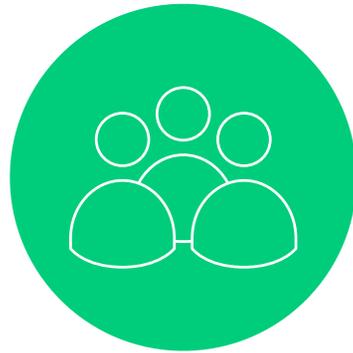
## Building a New Narrative

The ideas below reflect people's aspirations and values around Congress. This is our "formula" for renewing trust and hope.



### Serve the People First

Above all, the American people are looking for honesty and integrity in Congress. They recognize that when they see members put the needs of real people first—not political parties, powerful interests, or their own careers.



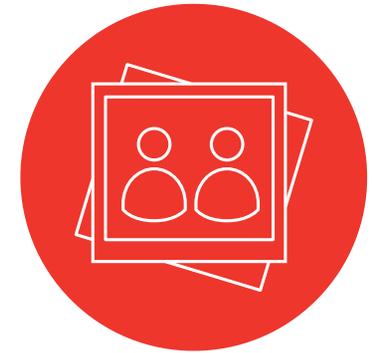
### Represent Everyone

Americans believe the job of Congress is to represent all the people of our diverse nation in making decisions that affect all of us. They expect members to represent everyone in their state or district, not just the people who voted for them.



### Work Together

People feel hopeful when they see members of Congress working together to solve problems, not scoring political points. They believe Congress works best when members work together to solve problems and take responsibility for making Congress work well.



### Put People in the Picture—And Connect Them to Congress

People need to know their voices are heard in Congress. Stories of successful advocacy by average Americans give people a sense of empowerment. Examples of legislation and constituent service that respond to the concerns of everyday people offer hope. Many don't know *how* to make their voices heard—show them what they can do.

The following pages explain the insights behind these ideas.



## SERVING THE PEOPLE FIRST

Above all, the American people are looking for honesty and integrity in Congress. They recognize that when they see members put the needs of real people first—not political parties, powerful interests, or their own careers.

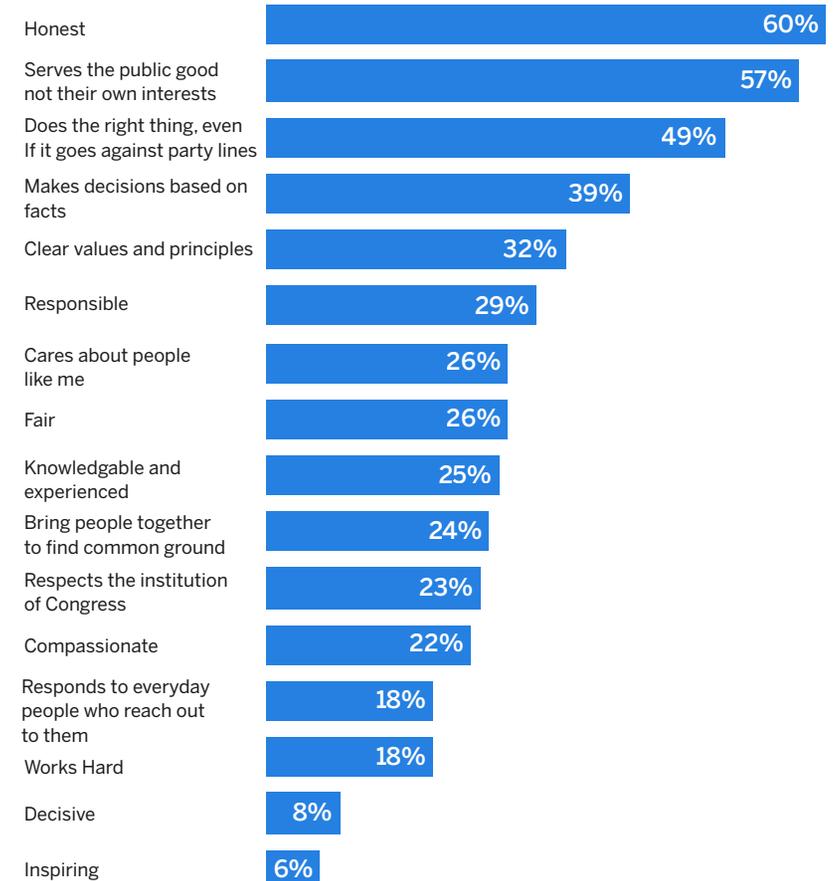
### WHY IT WORKS

**Many want to believe there are honest members of Congress doing the right thing.** Voters in our focus groups exhibited ambivalence about Congress, which means they are of two minds or have conflicting feelings. They spoke pessimistically about members of Congress, but also wanted to believe that there are honest people on Capitol Hill serving the public good.

Social science research suggests that these inner conflicts make us feel uneasy; we may change deeply held beliefs in order to resolve them and achieve peace of mind. Stories about Congress responding to the concerns of real people created a palpable sense of relief among even the most skeptical people. This powerful response speaks to the potential of solutions-oriented storytelling about Congress to change the dynamic of despair.

**Among qualities people want to see in Congress, integrity rises to the top.** Survey respondents were asked to choose the most important qualities they'd like to see in a member of Congress. In keeping with our findings about the dominant, negative narrative, the top three answers were all about integrity. People want members of Congress to be honest, which they recognize when they see them serving the public good versus their own self-interest, and doing the right thing, even if it goes against the party line.

### What are the most important qualities for a member of Congress to have? (Please select up to five)





On a scale of 0 to 10, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

“Congress would work better if members of Congress put the needs of real people first—not political parties, powerful interests, or their own careers.”

■ Strong Support ■ Soft Support ■ Opposition



Strong support shows respondents who rated each statement a 9 or 10. Soft support shows those who rated each statement a 6 to 8. Opposition shows those who rated each statement a 0 to 5.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS: QUOTES FROM VOTERS

“They’re **supposed to be working for us**, not gaining incredible wealth and power forever until they die.”

“They forget about the people who they’re **supposed to serve**. [...] They’re just doing everything that’s going to put them at the next level.”





# REPRESENT EVERYONE

Americans believe the job of Congress is to represent all the people of our diverse nation in making decisions that affect all of us. They expect members to represent everyone in their state or district, not just the people who voted for them.

## WHY IT WORKS

**Americans strongly believe the highest purpose of Congress is to represent everyone.** Given a list of statements about the purpose of the institution, by far the most popular one spoke to Congress's responsibility to "represent *all* the people of our diverse nation in making decisions."

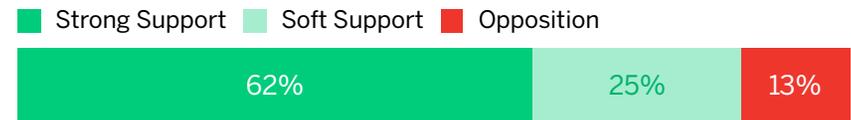
Six in 10 respondents strongly agreed with that statement—twice the number who said the role of a member of Congress is to "represent *my* interests when making decisions that affect *my* life" (emphasis added). The higher aspiration for Congress counters conventional wisdom that most people are motivated primarily by the transactional idea of "what's in it for them."

In a similar vein, 54 percent strongly agreed that "Congress would work better if members of Congress represented everyone in their state or district—not just the ones who voted for them."

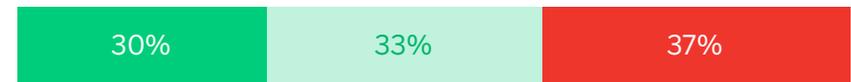
Clearly, this idea of inclusive representation is a key principle that should guide members of Congress. Voters in our focus groups responded strongly to this theme. Some bemoaned a lack of representation by members of Congress who seemed hostile to constituents who didn't share their political leanings.

*On a scale of 0 to 10, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*

*"Congress has a responsibility to represent all the people of our diverse nation in making decisions."*



*"My member of Congress is there to represent my interests when making decisions that affect my life."*



*"Congress would work better if members of Congress represented everyone in their state or district—not just the ones who voted for them."*



*Strong support shows respondents who rated each statement a 9 or 10. Soft support shows those who rated each statement a 6 to 8. Opposition shows those who rated each statement a 0 to 5.*



### IN THEIR OWN WORDS: QUOTES FROM VOTERS

“Most representatives, whether you voted for him or not, they represent you. [...] If I have an issue, **I have a right to call upon that person.**”

“If you get elected, you make known that you will not represent anything on the other side, things are so tribal now. It’s not, ‘I’m going to represent all of you.’ It’s like, ‘**I represent this tribe.**’”

“I’ve been **completely disenfranchised** as far as representation goes. There’s no way that I would be able to get any kind of [change].”





## WORK TOGETHER

People feel hopeful when they see members of Congress working together to solve problems, not scoring political points. They believe Congress works best when members work together to solve problems and take responsibility for making Congress work well.

### WHY IT WORKS

**Politicians are seen as focused on scoring points, not solving problems.** Given a list of statements about problems facing the institution, the top response was, “Too many politicians are more interested in scoring points than solving problems.”

This finding reflects input from expert interviews that news coverage and social media conversation tend to focus on high-profile members of Congress who engage in partisan tit-for-tat, especially on Twitter and cable news programs. They don’t often see the members who compromise and cooperate.

Four out of 10 strongly agreed that the media pays more attention to the “fighters” than the “doers.” Half of survey respondents strongly agreed that “fighting and gridlock” mean popular, common-sense policies don’t see the light of day.

*On a scale of 0 to 10, how big a problem are each of these statements?*

*“Too many politicians are more interested in scoring points than solving problems.”*

■ Strong Support ■ Soft Support ■ Opposition



*“Common-sense solutions supported by most people don’t get anywhere in Congress, because of all the fighting and gridlock.”*



*“The media pays more attention to the fighters in Congress than the doers.”*



*Strong agreement shows respondents who rated each statement a 9 or 10. Soft agreement shows those who rated each statement a 6 to 8. Disagreement shows those who rated each statement a 0 to 5.*



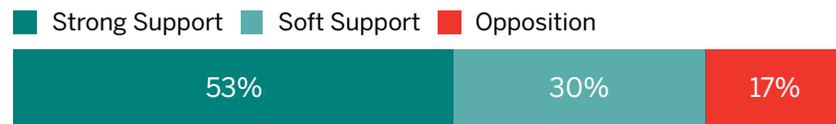
## WORK TOGETHER

**People expect members to make Congress work well.** Given a list of statements about what might help Congress work better, a majority of voters strongly supported the idea that members of Congress should take responsibility for making Congress work well (53%). Nearly half (46%) strongly agreed that some members are there to “disrupt the government, rather than make it work.” Information about the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress surprised focus group participants, who expressed support for the effort and wanted to hear more about it.

**Cooperation and compromise are key.** A majority of survey respondents strongly agreed that cooperation and compromise are key to finding common ground and creating common-sense solutions (51%). In focus groups, voters responded very positively to stories featuring bipartisan cooperation. Information about Democrats and Republicans working together on the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress earned praise, with many participants saying they want to see that kind of collaboration from all members of Congress.

*On a scale of 0 to 10, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*

*“Congress would work better if members of Congress take responsibility for making Congress work well.”*



*“Congress would work better if members of Congress cooperate and compromise to find common ground and create common-sense solutions.”*

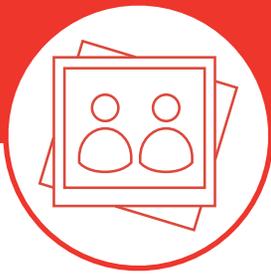


*Strong support shows respondents who rated each statement a 9 or 10. Soft support shows those who rated each statement a 6 to 8. Opposition shows those who rated each statement a 0 to 5.]*

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: QUOTES FROM VOTERS

*“There’s no center anymore. **There’s not that middle ground anymore.** You’re either far left or you’re far right. You vote that way and you stay that way.”*

*“[The public wants bipartisanship], but all that gets reported is everybody fighting.”*



## PUT PEOPLE IN THE PICTURE—AND CONNECT THEM TO CONGRESS

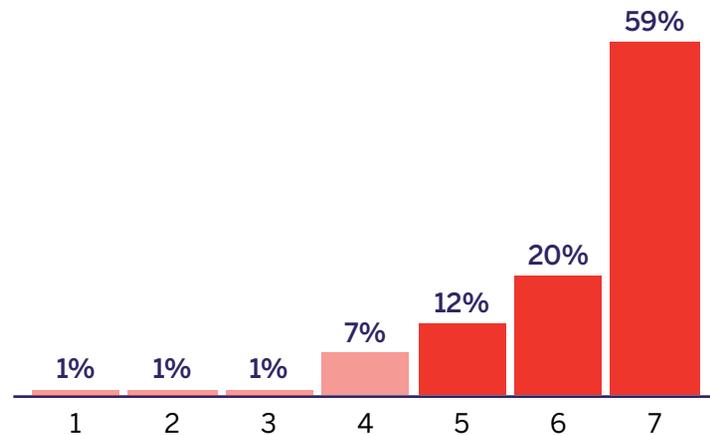
People need to know their voices are heard in Congress. Stories of successful advocacy by average Americans give people a sense of empowerment. Examples of legislation and constituent service that respond to the concerns of everyday people offer hope. Connecting people to Congress to get help and express their opinions can give them firsthand experience as empowered citizens.

### WHY IT WORKS

**Nine out of 10 Americans “really want Congress to change for the better.”** However, a majority (62%) are skeptical it can ever be fixed. In the face of a strongly felt desire for change, the idea that Congress can’t be fixed is a disheartening and dangerous narrative.

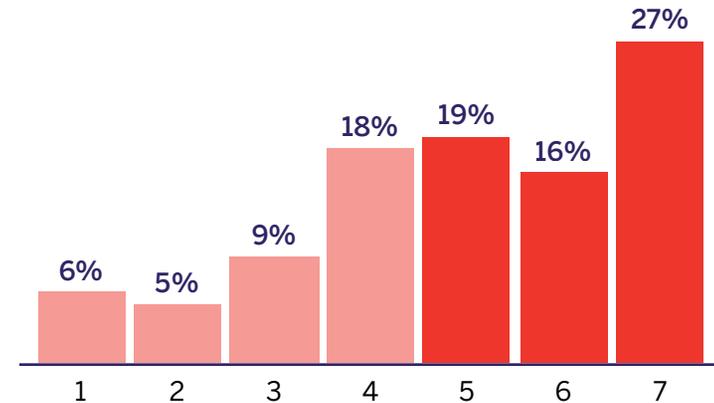
*On a scale of 1 to 7, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?*

**I really want Congress to change for the better.**



*On a scale of 1 to 7, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?*

**Congress is broken. It’s hard to imagine how it could ever be fixed.**





**Most believe the public has a role to play in strengthening Congress.**

A majority of respondents to our survey (52%) strongly agreed that voters have a role to play, agreeing that Congress would work better if “responsible Americans do our part by voting in every election and communicating our concerns to those we elect.”

*On a scale of 0 to 10, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?*

**“Congress would work better if responsible Americans do our part by voting in every election and communicating our concerns to those we elect.”**

■ Strong Support ■ Soft Support ■ Opposition



*Strong support shows respondents who rated each statement a 9 or 10. Soft support shows those who rated each statement a 6 to 8. Opposition shows those who rated each statement a 0 to 5.]*

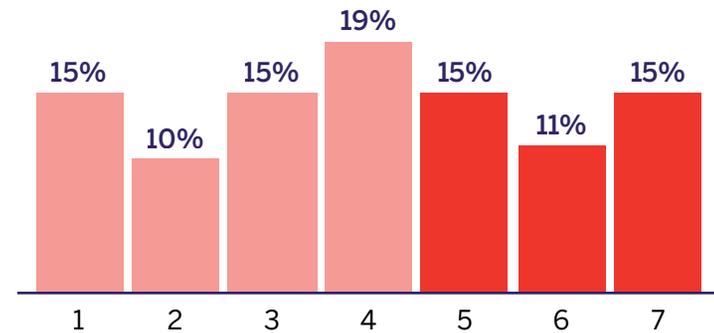
Research by [Public Agenda](#) found that 82 percent of Americans believe forging a healthier democracy requires ordinary people to get more involved in civic and political life. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) agreed that “it’s mostly our responsibility as Americans to help find solutions—it’s not enough to just vote and pay taxes.”

**But opinions are split on whether everyday people can do anything to change it.** Mobilizing people for a cause requires that they feel a sense of efficacy—they believe they can do something to make a difference. About 40 percent of our survey respondents felt that “there’s not much everyday people can do to change Congress for the better.” A similar number felt the opposite way.

Showing stories of everyday people making their voices heard can be encouraging. In our focus groups, sharing stories of people taking action and making a difference countered the negative narrative that “I can’t make a difference.”

*On a scale of 1 to 7, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?”*

**There’s not much everyday people can do to change Congress for the better.**





**People are eager for how-to information.** Survey respondents and focus group participants were very interested in receiving information that equips them to communicate with their members of Congress. 35 percent of survey respondents said they would be interested in receiving information from their members of Congress about government services and programs that might benefit them, and 26 percent were interested in a how-to guide for communicating with their member of Congress.

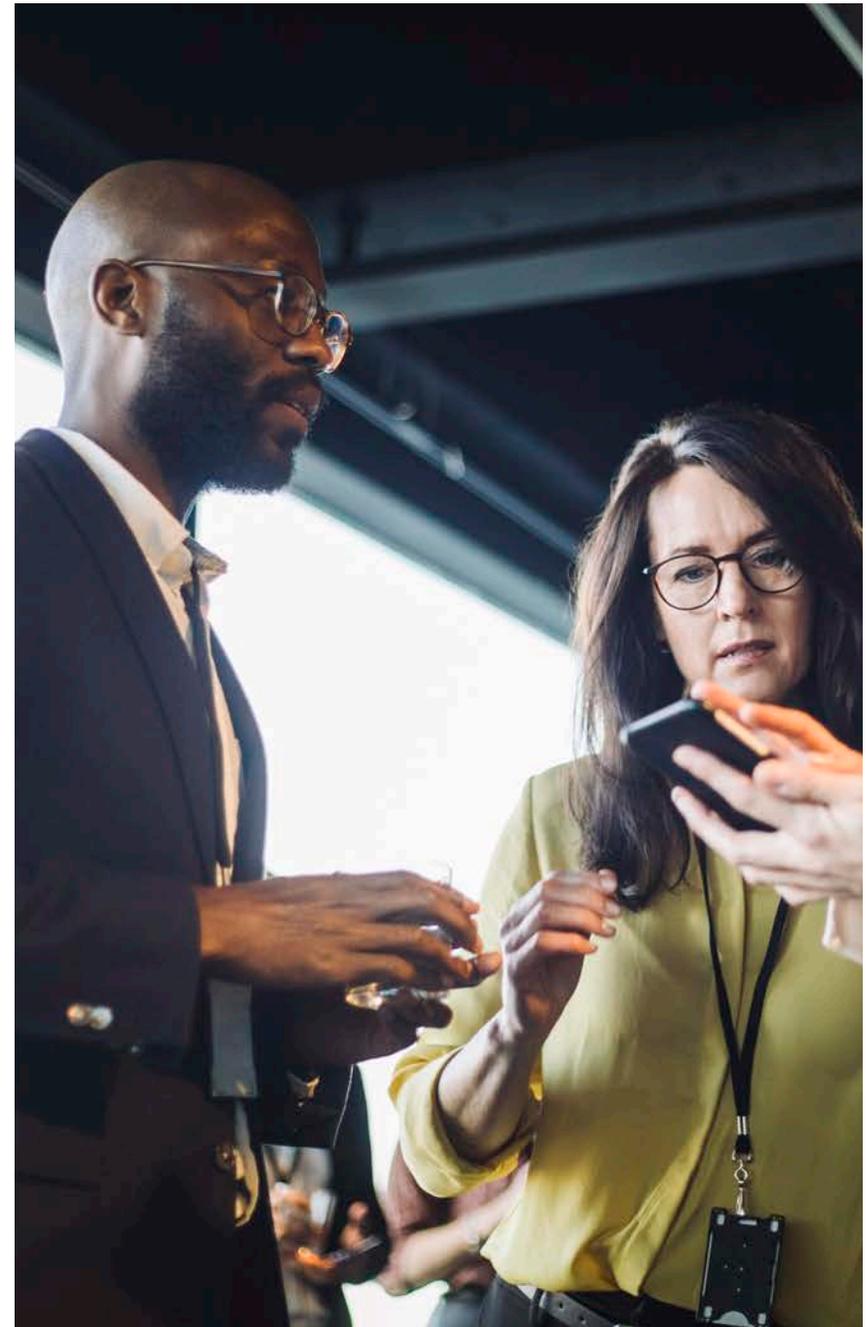
### IN THEIR OWN WORDS: QUOTES FROM VOTERS

“If I had an individual I could believe in, I would spend seven days, 24 hours a day trying to support them and get them elected.”

“Maybe if you get a little bit more involved, or if we had a greater percentage of the population who cared enough to push their Congressmen, **we might see some change.**”

“If you take some personal action, make an effort to make your voice heard...**it could make a difference**, under the right circumstances.”

“A lot of people don’t even really know how to go about contacting their representative. **[I’d like] a simple guide.**”



## ASPIRATIONAL NARRATIVE: Purpose and Principles

Drawing on the research explained above, the narrative on the next page focuses on the purpose of Congress and guiding principles for members of Congress.

Studies in systems change point to the importance of articulating the central purpose of an institution and key principles that shape decision-making and behavior within it.

Communicating them clearly and consistently is critical to making an institution work well—because it helps to inspire and guide the people who make the institution work. In the case of Congress, that means members, staff, and constituents.

People who hear these aspirational ideas consistently—and frequently see examples of Congress putting them into practice—may begin to believe the institution is working for them. More members of Congress and Congressional staff may be inspired to live up to them.

### Aspirational Communication

The messages reflect aspirations Americans hold for the institution and for individual members. Aspirational Communication is a powerful tool for creating positive change.

Our aspirations are our ideas about the lives we want to live and the world we want to live in. We're more likely to notice, remember, and be inspired by communications that reflect our aspirations.

By definition, these ideas represent the ideal. Voters participating in our research *agreed* with all of the messages, but most didn't *believe* they represented the current reality. They really *want* to see Congress and members of Congress representing these ideals.

Actions speak louder than words. These messages must always be accompanied by examples of real people in real situations who bring the ideas to life—along with information that equips people to connect with their members of Congress.

## Congress works for us.

Our Constitution says Congress is the people's voice in the federal government.

Honest members of Congress put the needs of real people first—not political parties, powerful interests, or their own careers.

Their job is to serve the public good, not their own self-interest.

## That means all of us.

Congress has a responsibility to represent all the people of our diverse nation in making decisions that affect all of us.

Members of Congress must represent everyone in their state or district—not just the ones who voted for them.

## Congress works when members respect the institution—and each other.

Responsible members of Congress respect the institution. They take responsibility for making it work well.

They work together to solve problems, not score political points. They cooperate and compromise. They find common ground and create common-sense solutions.

## Congress works when we do our part.

We can make Congress work better by supporting honest, responsible people who want to make Congress work well for all Americans.

We do our part by voting in every election. Communicating our concerns to elected officials. And holding them accountable to serve the people first.

Our voices really do make a difference.

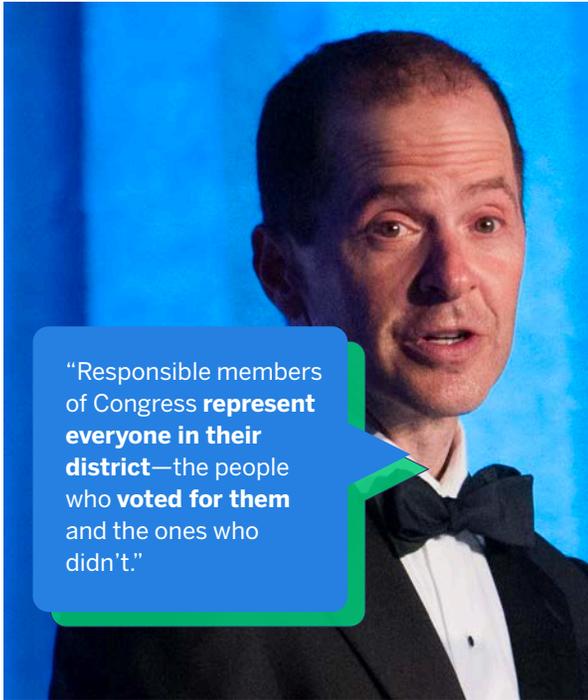


# WINNING WORDS

WINNING WORDS	IN THEIR OWN WORDS
<p><b>Congress works for us.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constitution</li> <li>People’s voice</li> <li>People first</li> <li>Public good, not self-interest</li> </ul>	<p>“That’s the truth out of the <b>Constitution</b>.” — Focus Group Participant</p> <p>“[Members of Congress should be] <b>honest</b> and willing to work towards the <b>greater good</b>, not just their own personal goals and agendas.” — Survey Respondent</p>
<p><b>That means all of us.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Represent <u>all</u> of us</li> <li>Everyone in their state or district</li> <li>Not just the ones who voted for them</li> </ul>	<p>“[Members of Congress should be] open to suggestion, willing to <b>make decisions for the good of all people</b>, and open to listening and learning from those who speak out.” — Survey Respondent</p> <p>“They should be <b>working for the people</b> who they <b>represent</b>.” — Focus Group Participant</p>
<p><b>Congress works when members respect the institution —and each other.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work together</li> <li>Cooperate</li> <li>Compromise</li> <li>Common ground</li> <li>Common-sense solutions</li> </ul>	<p>“The only way to make it work is to <b>work together</b>.” — Focus Group Participant</p> <p>“[The most important role of Congress is to] <b>compromise</b> to find <b>realistic solutions</b>.” — Survey Respondent</p>
<p><b>Congress works when we do our part.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support honest, responsible people</li> <li>Vote</li> <li>Communicate</li> <li>Our voices matter</li> </ul>	<p>“We, the people, are the employers of Congress. They are <b>responsible</b>—or should be—to the people!” — Survey Respondent</p> <p>“Don’t let somebody else choose. If you’re tired of negative divisive politics, <b>vote</b>. We need your <b>voice</b>.” — Policy Influencer</p>

## EXAMPLES OF WINNING WORDS IN ACTION

You can use Winning Words in any form of communication.



“Responsible members of Congress **represent everyone in their district**—the people who **voted for them** and the ones who didn’t.”

*Speeches*



The Modernization Committee represents the best of Congress. They are **responsible** members of Congress who respect the institution. Every member should make it their mission to help Congress serve the public good.

*Media interviews*



*Social media*

## EXAMPLES OF WINNING WORDS IN ACTION

 **Rep. Jane Doe**  
November 24, 2021 · 🌐

“I’m proud to be part of the Congress that just passed a bill safeguarding the Postal Service for a generation. This is what we can accomplish when we **work together**: common sense solutions that put the American **people first**.”

To all of my constituents who called my office, thank you for sharing your concerns. Your voices are the reason we were able to pass this landmark piece of legislation. Learn more about how our office can help with the issues you care about by visiting: [memberofcongress.com/connect](https://memberofcongress.com/connect)”  
— Representative

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

Facebook

 **AARP** @AARP · Mar 27

“Cosponsors of our prescription drug bill, thank you for **putting the people first**. We applaud your efforts to work together toward a **common-sense solution** to lower prescription drug prices for the American people.”



▶ 445 views    0:00 / 1:07 🔊 ↗

💬 1    ↻    ❤️ 2    ↗

Twitter

# STRATEGIC STORYTELLING

Strategic Stories are about real people in real situations that reflect the ideas in the narrative.

People are hungry to hear good news coming out of Congress. The most skeptical voters in our focus groups expressed a sense of relief when presented with examples of real people reaching out to Congress and receiving a response.

## Story Template

Stories don't have to be long. In fact, a short story can convey most of the concepts in our narrative.

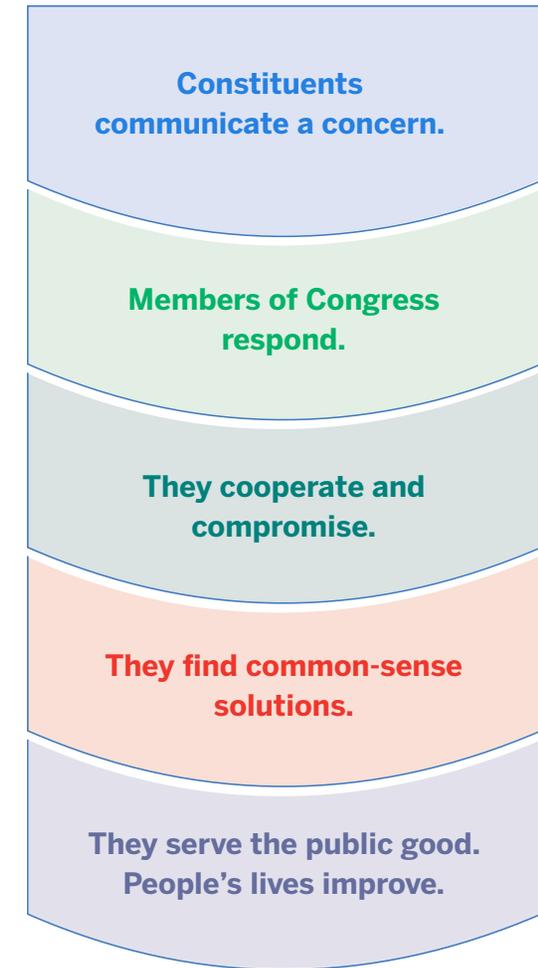
This simple template will help you craft stories with trust-building ingredients. Every story doesn't need to include every ingredient.

You can use this template to create presentations, social media posts, talking points for speeches, anecdotes you can tell in-person, and other kinds of communication.

When communicating with members of the public, encourage them to connect with Congress. Many don't know how to communicate with their elected representatives, so it's helpful to provide specific information or direct them to easy-to-use resources.

On the following pages, you'll see simple stories presented to voters in our focus groups, along with some of their reactions. Your stories are likely to include more details and information.

## Trust Building Stories



## Call to Action

Congress works for all of us.

Here are specific things you can do:

- Email or call them.
- Visit their local office.
- Attend a public meeting with them.
- Join an organization that works with Congress on issues you care about.

Contact your members of Congress to make *your* voice heard.

## LEGISLATION STORIES

This simple story is about a major piece of legislation crafted and enacted with bipartisan participation, framed as a response to constituent concerns.

### Congress Works to Improve Postal Service

After hearing complaints about slow mail service, Congress came together this year to help make the U.S. Postal Service work better for the American people.

Democrats and Republicans worked together and consulted with experts in business and government.

Together, they made a plan for making mail service more reliable and efficient. A large majority of members in both parties voted for the measure.

The reforms will help the Postal Service save billions of dollars, while improving services for millions of Americans.

*Congress works for all of us.*

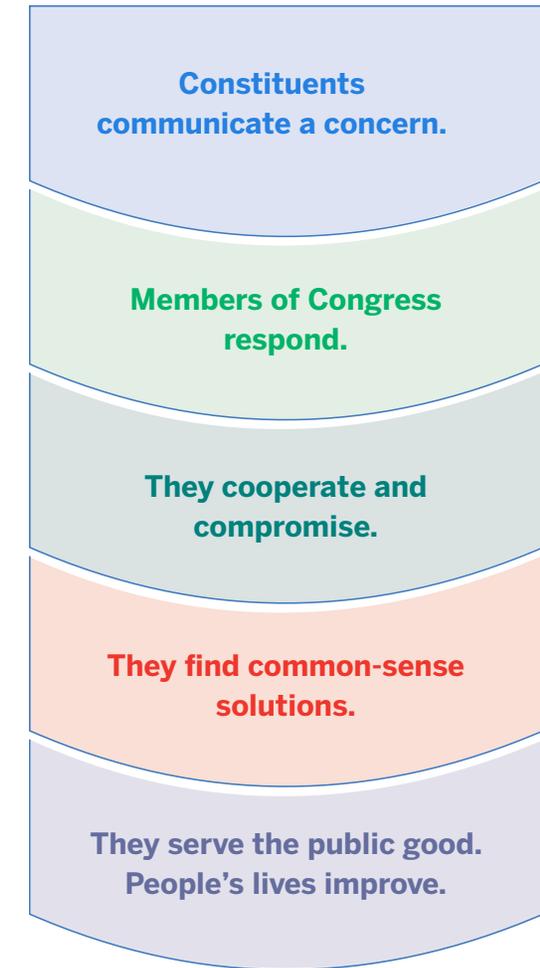
*Contact your members of Congress to make your voice heard.*

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“If they did save millions or billions of dollars to the taxpayers, while improving the mail service—yeah, I’d want to hear about it. **It’s OK to say you did something successfully.**”

“It’s really good to see the parties **working in unison** to do something that was for the benefit of the people.”

### Trust Building Stories



### Watch Your Tone

People are skeptical of stories that make politicians look like heroes. This story mentions that members consult with experts, which shows that Congress doesn't have all the answers and does its homework.

## OVERSIGHT STORIES

This is a story about members of an oversight committee who responded to constituent concerns and worked with the relevant agencies to address them.

### Your Voice Matters

A member of Congress in Minnesota heard from constituents who were soldiers and airmen in the National Guard and Reserves. These part-time members of the military did similar jobs as active-duty members, but didn't get the same pay or benefits, like health care and paid time off.

The Congressperson and his staff reached out to the National Guard Association and the Reserve Officers Association to learn more about the problem. They worked with the Department of Defense to explore solutions.

The Congressperson, a Democrat, enlisted the help of a Republican colleague from Mississippi. Together, they wrote a bill requiring the military to provide National Guard and Reserve members with the same benefits as their active duty peers.

Congress passed the bill. Thanks to the constituents who spoke up, members of the National Guard and Reserves now get the pay and benefits they deserve.

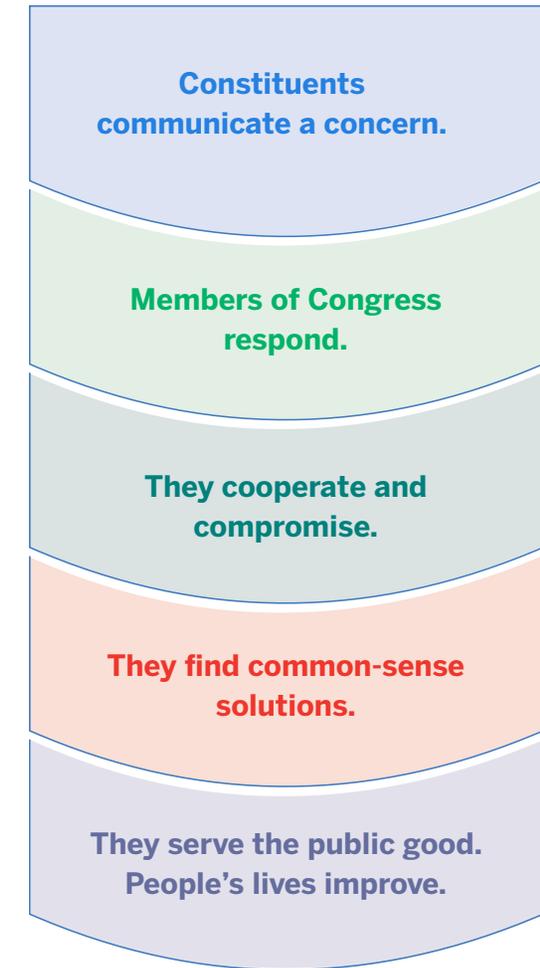
*Congress works for all of us.*

*Contact your members of Congress to make your voice heard.*

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“If you get a little bit more involved...we might see some change.”

### Trust Building Stories



#### Frame it First

Research shows that a story can change attitudes when it is framed first by a message indicating that it holds a larger lesson, like the headline on this story.

## CONSTITUENT SERVICE STORIES

This simple story is about a major piece of legislation crafted and enacted with bipartisan participation, framed as a response to constituent concerns.

### Congress Works for All of Us

Eighty-year-old Kathy always looked forward to visits from her home health aide, who helps her with daily tasks so she can live at her own home instead of a nursing home.

One day in 2020, the aide told Kathy she couldn't visit any more because she was unable to get masks to protect them from COVID. Kathy was devastated.

A friend suggested she contact her member of Congress for help. Kathy did not vote for the representative, but decided to reach out anyway.

To Kathy's surprise, her representative's office sprang into action. A staff member located a supply of masks and sent them to Kathy's aide.

Inspired by Kathy's call, the staff member made sure other seniors and home health aides were able to get masks.

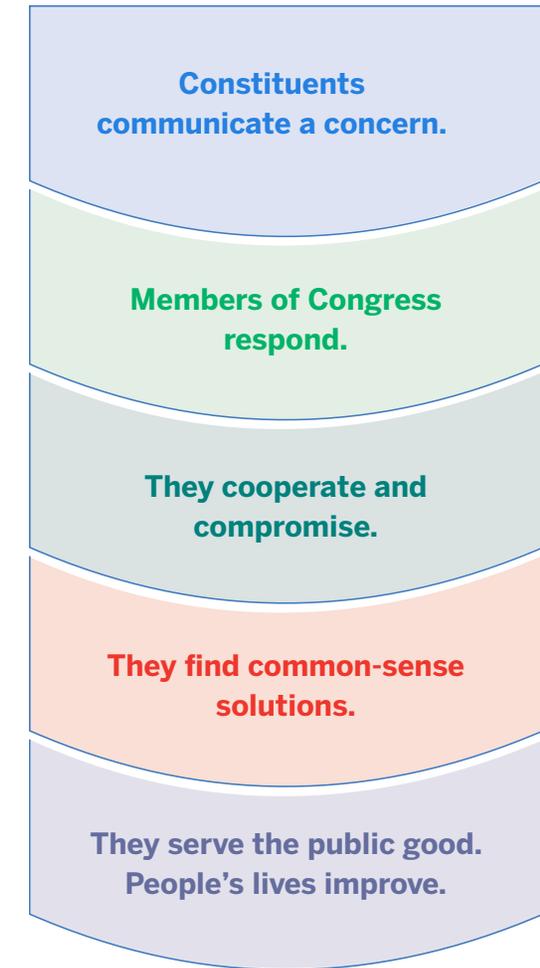
*Congress works for all of us.*

*Contact your members of Congress to make your voice heard.*

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I would like to receive news about how Congress is helping people. It'll **build my faith** in them. It will show people that yes, they're really working." — Focus group participant

### Trust Building Stories



### Surprise Opens Eyes

Surprise is an emotional reaction that focuses our attention. Voters were surprised that this Congressional office responded to a constituent who had not voted for the member of Congress—a small detail that delivered a meaningful message.

## ADVOCACY STORIES

This kind of story encourages people to engage with Congress, while addressing their concern that Congress doesn't represent everyday people.

### Putting People Before Party

In Flint, Michigan, advocacy organizations and residents were fighting to hold leaders accountable for hazardous water quality and resulting health issues. They decided to bring their fight to Congress. Residents testified in front of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee about the high levels of lead in their drinking water.

Members of the Committee—both Democrats and Republicans—expressed outrage and pledged to conduct a comprehensive investigation.

They issued a subpoena for the Environmental Protection Agency's former regional chief, and demanded that the governor of Michigan comply with the Committee's request for documents relating to the crisis.

As a result of constituent advocacy and congressional action, over 10,000 pipes have been replaced in Flint and nine people were charged with crimes relating to the Flint water crisis.

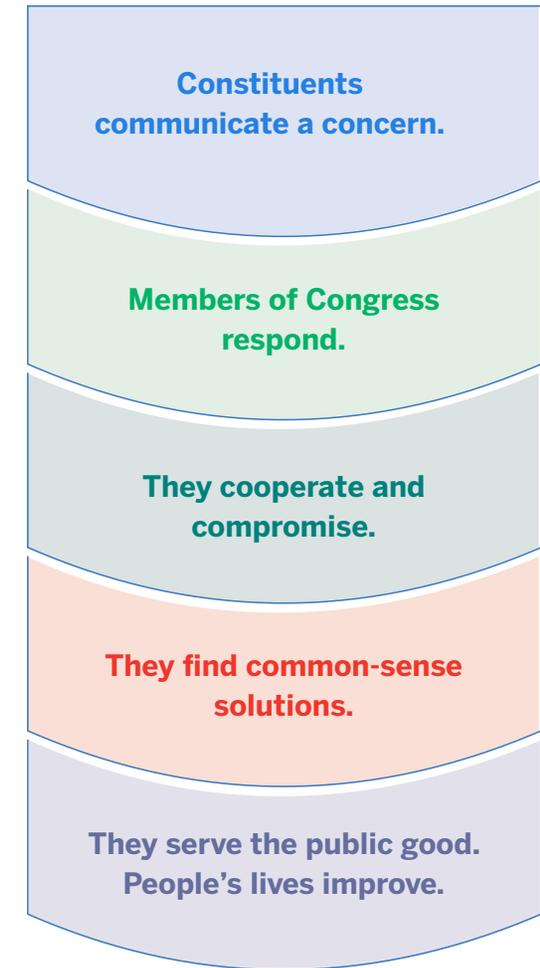
*Congress works for all of us.*

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### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Congress will make the right decision ... because of **a lot of public pressure.**” —  
Focus Group Participant

### Trust Building Stories



#### Show and Tell

Stories featuring people communicating with Congress will encourage others to do the same. The more people connect with Congress and feel their voices are heard, the more they'll trust that the institution works for them.

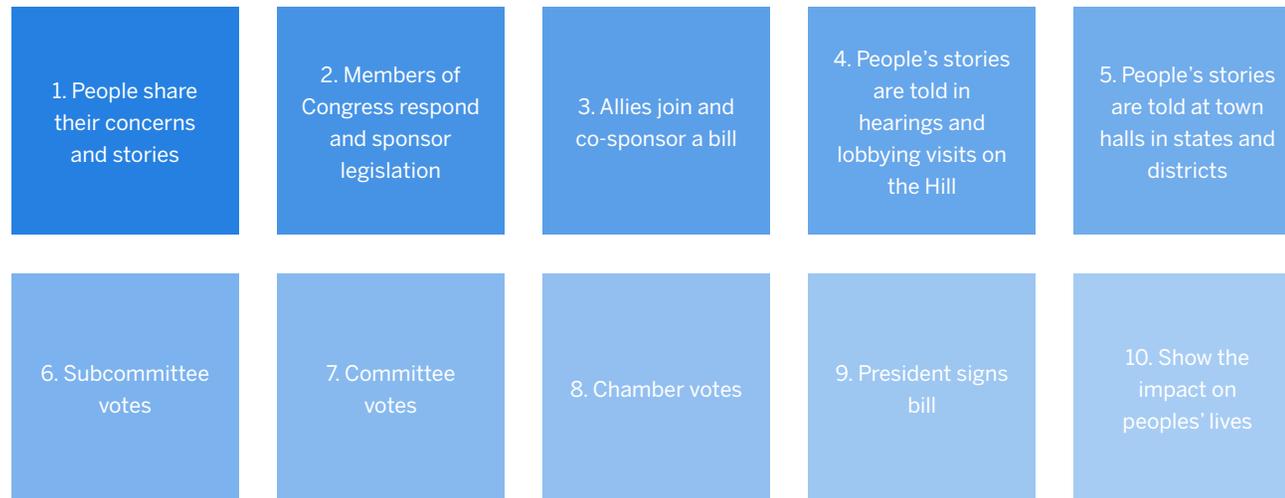
## ADVOCACY STORYTELLING

Communications about Congress often obscure the role that constituents can play in making a difference. This prevents people from seeing what they can do to create change.

The tone of communications by advocacy organizations can drive negative narratives about Congress. Advocacy messaging often invokes anger at Congress to mobilize people. This works for people who are motivated by anger, but studies show that the negative tone turns off most Americans.

Organizations that mobilize people for policy advocacy can appeal to a larger audience of engaged voters—and avoid feeding into the dynamic of despair around Congress—by showing how constituents help to create good policies by participating in advocacy activities.

Below is an **Advocacy Storytelling Map** organizations can use to both educate and inspire engaged citizens, by telling a fuller story about how Congress works—and the role everyday people play in the process.



Each step of the legislative process offers an opportunity to communicate with voters, connect people to Congress, and recognize members of Congress who respond to the voices of their constituents.

“People want bipartisan solutions. [...] There’s still at least inherently this desire for people to come together for the good of the country, I think, across political lines, particularly with [our] members.” “People are craving these types of stories.” — Major Advocacy Organization Leader

## TARGET AUDIENCE: READY FOR ACTION

Distrust toward Congress is widespread, but our research identified a group of 46 million voters who express a cautious level of trust in Congress.

They are engaged voters, many of whom contact their Congressperson, attend town halls, and donate to advocacy groups or political organizations. Members of this target can be mobilized to share messages, stories, and information to help renew trust and hope among their fellow Americans.

### **Trusting**

They are defined by their high levels of trust in institutions and experts. They express higher levels of trust in Congress than other Americans—including their member of Congress and the public servants who work in the federal government—but their trust still needs to be earned. They see Congress as essential to running the country well. They believe that members of Congress understand their challenges, and do a better job than they're given credit for.

*NOTE: They're more trusting than others, but they're surrounded by negative news and views about Congress—so they're also susceptible to skepticism. They need reassurance—reasons to believe their trust is well-founded.*

### **Optimistic**

They see themselves as optimistic. They don't see Congress as broken beyond repair. They believe our political system can be fixed, and the country can be united. They understand the problems we face, but they try to be optimistic and keep a positive attitude.

### **Engaged**

They enjoy life, meeting new people, and learning about challenges and issues facing their communities. They are interested in applying their skills, talents, resources, and passions to donate and volunteer their time for causes they care about. They enjoy sharing information with family and friends. They feel they're good at encouraging others to get involved.

### **Empowered**

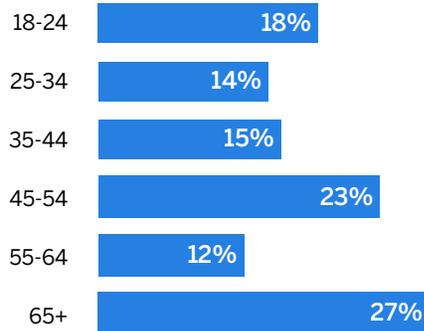
They have a strong sense of self-efficacy and empowerment. They believe that everyday people can make a difference. They aren't afraid to talk about politics to help create change.

## Demographics

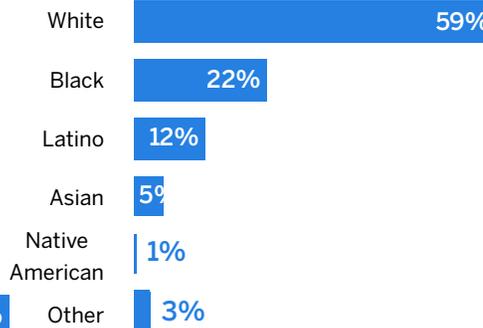
### Gender



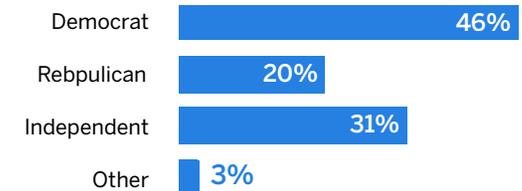
### Age



### Race/ Ethnicity



### Political Party



## Channels: How to reach them

28 million use Facebook at least once a day

25 million use YouTube at least once a day

14 million use Instagram at least once a day

10 million use Twitter at least once a day

## Activities: How to engage them

**55%** are interested in: Receiving news about actions taken by Congress and how they affect people's lives

**51%** are interested in: Receiving information from their members of Congress about government services and programs that might benefit them

**37%** are interested in: Connecting with Congress online town halls to discuss issues important to their community

**36%** are interested in: Receiving a how-to guide for communicating with your members of Congress

**36%** are interested in: Common Ground Conversations between Democrats and Republicans in Congress, hosted by respected journalists or celebrities

**35%** are interested in: Receiving surprising stories about members of Congress with different views and backgrounds working together

**34%** are interested in: A social media channel dedicated to sharing news, information and stories about members of Congress focused on solving problems, not scoring political points

**27%** are interested in: An annual awards show recognizing members of Congress who work with others to get things done

**26%** are interested in: Sharing personal examples of how Congress has helped them, their family, or their community



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