

2020 Election: Advocating for Refugees and Asylum Seekers



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

A Guide for Contacting Candidates During COVID-19

Our goal is to make sure that candidates in races across the country state their affirmative support for welcoming refugees and asylum seekers.

We're at a critical moment in time

Amidst the largest refugee crisis in recorded history, and the upcoming 2020 elections, we find ourselves in a critical moment to make an impact. U.S. policy towards refugees and asylum seekers has dramatically shifted in just a few years, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to seek safety and protection, affecting the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

The future of refugee resettlement and the asylum system in the U.S. hinges on the attitudes of the leaders we elect in November. During the 2020 election cycle, we must ensure that candidates are provided with accurate and accessible information about refugees and asylum seekers. **You have an integral role to play.** We need your help reaching congressional candidates running in your district.

Due to COVID-19's altering of how we can conduct advocacy we must be creative in our tactics. This guide is here to serve you during social distancing, as you advocate for refugees and asylum seekers to be welcomed in the United States.

Initial Steps

1. Sign up to join the campaign

Use this [form](#) to indicate in which districts you are working. This necessary step allows HIAS to support your efforts and better track the outreach that is happening!

2. Do your research

Visit this [link](#) to find out who is running for office in your area. Research what they have said about refugee and asylum seekers in the past. Remember, candidates running for office at all levels of government will benefit from learning about asylum, the humanitarian crisis at the U.S.-Mexico border, and refugee resettlement in the U.S.

Additionally, you can get up-to-date on the important issues and policy talking points, by reviewing the following HIAS platform and resources for candidates, which can be accessed at

the [Vote For Welcome 2020 webpage](#).

3. Join an election training webinar

HIAS will make a select number of training webinars available as additional support for this project. Visit this [link](#) to sign up for an upcoming HIAS training on effective advocacy tactics during the election season. You will learn from professional organizers how to deliver messages and mobilize your community

How to Reach Candidates

Tactic 1: Set up a meeting

This is the *highest-impact* strategy because it involves personal conversation.

Schedule the Meeting: Call or email the campaign staff to request a phone or zoom call with the candidate or campaign manager. In that message, explain who you are, where you work, and what you do. Point out the staffer or candidate with whom you want to meet. Provide times and dates you can meet. Explain, in one or two sentences, what you would like to discuss in the meeting. A good rule of thumb is to follow-up three times.

Prepare for the Meeting: If you can, bring together a group of people from your synagogue, local community group, or even just a group of concerned voters. Prep with the group, so that everyone knows the talking points, and which points they will be covering. If the candidate is already an elected official, learn what committees he/she sits on, what issues are of interest to them, and most importantly, what have they said about refugees and asylum in the past. With the group, have a clear plan.

Maintain the Relationship: Follow up by saying thank you, reiterating the asks, and providing candidates with HIAS resources to help them build a more welcoming campaign. Invite them to refugee related community events and meetings.

Tactic 2: Ask questions in virtual town hall meetings and [Reddit AMAs](#)

This is a high-impact strategy because it creates public accountability. To get started, follow your candidates on social media to find out when Virtual Town Hall Meetings and Reddit AMAs will occur. Before the meeting, consider coordinating with fellow advocates to ask similar but different questions about refugees. Candidates who receive more questions about a certain topic are more likely to answer the question, as long as they don't feel attacked. Here are some sample questions:

- What are your views on the U.S. response to the global refugee crisis today?
- If elected, will you press the Administration to restore the United States' role as a global leader in refugee protection by increasing the number of refugees resettled in the U.S.?
- What are your views on the U.S. response to asylum seekers arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border?

- If elected, how will you ensure that your Administration prioritizes rights and protection for vulnerable people seeking safety?

If your candidate responds, what did they say? Spread the word on social media.

Tactic 3: Invite candidates or campaigns to attend online events.

Educating candidates leads to better policies. If your community or organization has programs planned that demonstrate local support for refugees invite candidates and campaigns to participate. Alternately, invite candidates to [HIAS@Home](#) programs and briefing calls.

Tactic 4: Post positive stories about refugees in local facebook groups

During COVID-19, candidates are using local Facebook groups to understand and connect with voters. Search for those groups and post positive stories about refugees and asylum seekers. It makes a greater impact if you amplify stories about people that live in your district.

Tactic 5: Tweet positive stories and direct actions at local candidates

Tweeting at candidates is a simple way to make sure your message is seen by campaigns and a wider public. Tag candidates, and then share information, local stories, and your advocacy asks. In addition, candidates tweet frequently. Ask them to tweet messages in support of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to the U.S, and thank them when they do.

Take note - a few key rules about election rules and 501(c)(3)

HIAS, like many organizations, is a 501(c)(3) organization. We do not endorse or support any particular party, candidate, or campaign for office. The goal of this campaign is to educate candidates running in all races about refugee and asylum issues, irrespective of political party. We seek to educate future leaders - not to promote any campaign over another.

HIAS will provide the same contact and materials to each candidate running for a particular elected position. If you are using this guide, we request that you do the same.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions about campaign outreach and what is permissible, particularly if you represent another 501(c)(3) organization, such as a synagogue or local refugee agency.

You are here to lead. We are here to help.

HIAS staff have resources and connections to help you. If you have any questions about how to get involved in this initiative, please contact [Trevor Dworetz](#), Grassroots Campaign Fellow, or [Rebecca Kirzner](#), Senior Director of Grassroots Campaigns. If you have questions about HIAS' policy positions, contact Policy Office [Liz Mandelman](#).