



## Inviting Members of Congress to Common Heritage Events

As you begin planning your Common Heritage events, you may consider inviting local public figures, including Members of Congress. Members of Congress can help draw attention to events in the media and in your community. Here are some suggestions for engaging Members of Congress or other elected officials in your public events.

### Starting Out


- Think about who you would like to invite. You may invite the local Member of Congress and both Senators. You should invite the Member of Congress whose district is home to the event's venue (other Members may be uncomfortable acting as a host at an event in another Member's district unless they share a metro area and generally attend events together). Also consider inviting state and local elected officials.
- Collaborate within your institution—check with your executive director, communications colleagues, government affairs colleagues, etc. before reaching out. In some cases, an executive director or a board member may be best person to extend the invitation. If you are handling the invitation, keep your colleagues updated on your progress—it may impact who else is invited to attend and whose roles shift at the event.
- Figure out what kind of role you would like to offer the Member in the event. When considering invitations, offices often look for a speaking role, opportunity for photos, press, social media, or other opportunity that will ensure that the Member of Congress will gain exposure by participating. Keep in mind too that Members may not have much time in their schedule, so consider offering them the opportunity to drop in briefly.



### Inviting a Member of Congress

- **First:** Call the Member's office (you can find the main phone number on their website) and ask who you should contact about scheduling requests in their state or district. While many Members have a scheduler that manages all of their requests, some members have one scheduler for their time in Washington, D.C. and another for when they are home. If you are connected to the scheduler while calling the office, you can make your request and promise to follow up via email. You can also ask NEH's Congressional Affairs staff for contacts by emailing [ejones@neh.gov](mailto:ejones@neh.gov).
- **Second:** Send your invitation via email at least three weeks before the event (preferably even earlier). Some offices may direct you to fill out a form on their website. Fill out the form if prompted, but plan to follow up to ensure the request was received and will be considered. Your invitation should include:
  - Exact date, time, and location
  - Briefing materials about the program and what to expect at the event
  - Information about who will be in attendance and the size of the audience
  - Planned press coverage or social media
- **Third:** Follow up on your invitation. It may take some time for the office to determine whether or not the Member will be available to attend. After a week or two, if you have not heard back, follow up once or twice by phone or email. If the staff promises to get back to you by a specific date, wait until that date to follow up. If it seems like it may be difficult for the Member to attend, consider offering to have the Member's district/state director attend in their place or ask if the office would like to make a video of the Member that can be played at the event.

Following Up

If Yes	If No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designate a person to assist the Member and staff on the day of the visit. The office may ask for this person’s cell number so they can call before they arrive. This person should have a good understanding of the schedule and know their way around the venue.</li> <li>• Send the staff briefing material in advance. Include important stakeholders to thank and pronunciation guides for names if necessary. Include context about the rest of the event, but be sure to highlight the Member’s role.</li> <li>• Ask the office if there is a bio they would like you to use for an introduction (especially if they have a speaking role). Let the office know who will be introducing the Member.</li> <li>• Include information about the Member in the invitation, press release, etc. if the office is amenable. Run anything with the Member’s name by staff before it goes public (in some cases, the office may need to check ethics guidelines). Collaborate with the press secretary/communications director if there is interest. Alert NEH so we can spread the word too.</li> <li>• Confirm details the day before and re-send logistics information to be sure the staffer has everything they need.</li> <li>• Ask if the Member would like to digitize an item.</li> <li>• Be prepared for last minute changes, including cancellations. Members’ schedules are busy and subject to change. Have a backup plan. If the Member was listed on publicity material have some nice remarks ready about how much the Member wanted to attend but could not make it at the last minute.</li> <li>• Send a thank you note after the event and share photos, press coverage, and any thank yous from participants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank them for their response.</li> <li>• Ask if the Member could make a short video that could be played at the event. Offer to provide a script or talking points.</li> <li>• Ask if a staff member would like to attend and be a part of the program on behalf of the Member.</li> <li>• Offer to follow up with information about how the event goes and future opportunities for collaboration.</li> </ul> 

Sample Invitation

Dear [Scheduler’s name],  
 On behalf of [Institution], I would like to invite [Member of Congress] to participate in an event we are hosting on [Date], at [time], at [location—if different from institution] in [city, if necessary]. [Institution] will be hosting a daylong event for community members to digitize artifacts related to [topic] to create a community collection that will be available for view at [institution] and online.

[Institution] received a competitive Common Heritage grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to offer this opportunity to our community. We anticipate [#] community members will attend the event. We will begin the event with remarks from [other people making remarks] and would be honored if [Member of Congress] could be part of the program. We will also be inviting [names of local media outlets] to cover the event and will document the event on social media.

I understand that the [Congressman’s/Senator’s] schedule is very full, so please know that we will be flexible on timing and can make adjustments to the schedule to accommodate a short visit. Please feel free to call or email me with any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks,  
 [Your Name]