

Indivisible Austin: Texas Legislature Edition (1.0)

Expand Democracy and Advance Human Rights

Y'ALL!

In 2017, we saw the birth of a movement of hundreds of thousands of local activists who started organizing with their neighbors and participating in our democracy to resist the cruel and hate-filled Trump agenda. But the power of an activated constituency shouldn't stop at our federal representatives in Washington. **We have elected officials making decisions on our behalf at all levels of government** — from our local school board to our city council and state legislature. The strategy outlined in the original [Indivisible Guide](#) describes, in general terms, how to engage in the democratic process; those tactics can be applied to anyone that we elect to represent our interests in government. For the last two years, we've followed the stories of dozens of Indivisible groups across the country that have realized that their constituent power has more leverage locally and have already begun taking their activism to the state level to create change in their communities.

Indivisible Austin (IATX) formed after the 2016 election when one of our founders created a Twitter account and sent out a very simple message:

"DMs are open if you want to join the Resistance."

The grassroots reaction was immediate and powerful. We quickly grew in ranks and established ourselves as an official 501(c)(4) non-profit with a diverse board of directors that we felt reflected the progressive spirit of our city. Now, we serve as both a leader, convener, and resource among Austin-area activists.

This guide is intended to be a public resource for any and all Texans interested in the state legislative process. We admit it may not be comprehensive, but we believe it has all the essentials to help folks reach new heights of civic engagement. We will provide the link to a final version of this guide to all who want it—and will continue to update it as needed (including correcting any typos and/or inaccuracies we missed during edits!) **Please don't hesitate to flag anything for us or to reach out with questions: we are emphatically human.**

This document has been adapted from a national guide published by the national Indivisible organization based in D.C. (and we thank them for their hard work!) but IATX does not receive direct financial support from those fine folks—we are fully volunteered-powered. As a result, we thank the many activists across the state who contributed to this guide to help inform and empower activists here in Texas.

Summary

Here's a quick-and-dirty summary of this document. While this page summarizes top-level takeaways, the full document describes how to actually carry out these activities.

CHAPTER 1: How we can leverage the Texas legislature

We examine the opportunities that state legislatures--even ones with conservative majorities like ours--have to provide a progressive vision for our state and country and resist our state's leadership.

CHAPTER 2: How the Texas legislature works

In this chapter, we outline what motivates state legislators, top-line summaries of the policymaking process, and resources for you to learn more about our legislature, and how to track bills and find your way around the Capitol.

CHAPTER 3: Organizing in Texas & being a good partner

To maximize your effectiveness in state advocacy, you should organize both in your local community and across your state. By combining your collective Indivisible power, you can more effectively exert influence on your state legislature. But it's critical to build coalitions and partnerships with existing organizations and impacted communities.

CHAPTER 4: Making a campaign plan

Once you learn about Texas's legislature and organize, it's time to think strategically and build an impactful campaign around specific pieces of state legislation.

APPENDICES: Some templates and a deep-dive or two on specific topics to help you drive forward your campaign.

- **Appendix 1: Key dates for Texas's 86th legislative session**
- **Appendix 2: Example strategic campaign plan**
- **Appendix 3: Public testimony at a legislative hearing**
- **Appendix 4: Written letters to a policy committee**
- **Appendix 5: Tips on Local Media Strategy**

Chapter 1. How we can leverage the Texas legislature

Regardless of the strategy we take at the federal level, there remain important opportunities for constituents to act both defensively and proactively at the state level. There are even some issues that we can better address at the state level — issues like redistricting, voting rights, abortion access, police violence, and supporting our undocumented neighbors. **States are often able to act more quickly than the federal government, which means that they are absolutely critical for long term progressive power building.** In short, we need to conduct effective advocacy in Texas if we are ever going to achieve the transformational changes that we want to see.

Sometimes, given the deeply entrenched grip that conservatives seem to have across our state, it can feel pointless to engage with our state officials. **But Texas saw HUGE gains for progressives in 2018**—we flipped two Congressional seats, got a record number of Democratic women elected to the Texas House, and saw local government in many areas of our state completely transform (shout out to Harris County!).

It's imperative we leverage these gains during Texas's next legislative session.

How is Texas critical to the progressive movement?

- 1. The eyes of America are upon Texas.** Governor Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton are some of the Trump Administration's biggest supporters. In a political climate where the federal government is controlled by an opposing party that is dead-set on attacking our values, it is critical that we exercise our power where we have the most *leverage*, which for some of us is actually at the *state level*. We can develop legislative champions in the statehouse to leverage the media attention that comes from being the epicenter of many of the worst atrocities in the country.
- 2. We can show our values.** Similarly, the media attention that surrounds Texas on key issues of equality allows us to demonstrate the ideals that we as progressives stand for: a clean environment, economic justice, health care for all, racial equity, a true representative democracy, gender and sexual equity, and civil rights.

Working with our long-standing state legislative champs and also—perhaps especially—with the new members of the statehouse that were elected with local Indivisibles' support will give us new visibility and power. Helping to introduce and support truly progressive legislation—meaning real, fully-imagined policy proposals as opposed to media gimmicks—and complementing them with grassroots support and media

strategies will help us show others in our state, as well as the country, what Texans really stand for.

3. **Only through grassroots activism can we “unrig” the system.** The electoral system has been purposefully and unfairly stacked against Democrats at the state level via voter suppression and gerrymandering. The gains we saw in the Texas legislature during the 2018 election are a powerful first step to ending this trend in our state. Further, the state legislature will be tasked with redrawing elected officials’ districts in just a few years. If we can continue to build this power, we will have a huge impact.
4. **Finally, constituents often have much more leverage at the state level.** For a number of reasons, state legislators are less likely than Members of Congress to hear from their constituents on a given issue, and much more likely to hear from corporate and special interest lobbyists. However, this presents an opportunity: because Texas legislators often aren’t hearing directly from their constituents, a small amount of engagement can make a huge difference. A typical U.S. House member has around 700,000 constituents; a state legislator represents as few as 3,291 constituents. Due to this, as few as 100 coordinated calls to a state legislator’s office can get noticed and make an impact on their decisions.

What tools do we have?

- **State legislation.** In order to become law, legislation must be introduced, debated, and voted on by elected state representatives and signed by the Governor. Even if progressive legislation is likely to be blocked here in Texas, we can underscore our values and provide united talking points for Indivisible groups across the state. This will help us in the long-term as we seek to create long-lasting change, but also help us to advance incremental policies that are no less important.
- **Media attention.** Even outside specific bills, we must leverage the media attention that comes from living in Texas. Our goal is to build progressive power, not score a quick media hit that only speaks to our base. By continuing to demonstrate and resist, along with lifting up real policy solutions that would help all Texans live healthy and happy lives, we can set a new standard for Texas.
- **Strength in numbers. Y’all, we’re a big state.** And we know what it means to have lived under our regressive state leadership for so long: reduced access to the polls; voter suppression; severely restricted access to comprehensive women’s health care; misplaced funding priorities that hurt consumers, students, and safety-net providers;

removing protections for the LGBTQ+ community; and ceaseless attacks on immigrant communities.

It's absolutely critical to show up in solidarity with those communities to fight back and push for reforms that would undo the GOP's attacks on the democratic system. Furthermore, advocacy and electoral work go hand in hand; you can make inroads by working on state legislative elections to slowly change the composition of your legislature and make it less red over time.

What motivates Texas legislators?

- **State legislators care about re-election.** Just like your federal representatives, your state legislators are elected by their constituents. Therefore, they need *your vote* in order to remain in (or win) office. This is the primary source of your power.
- **State legislators care about passing bills.** Legislators often consider the number of bills they get signed into law as a measure of their success.
- **State legislators often are not used to hearing from constituents.** With some exceptions (such as when a controversial bill is moving), state legislatures do not receive much media attention — which means that many constituents do not know what is going on. As a result, people don't usually engage in the state legislative process, and legislators are more often responsive to lobbyists in the capitol than their own constituents. Replacing apathy with activism presents an enormous opportunity for you to make an impact at your statehouse.
- **State legislators are influenced by money and lobbying.** Because state legislators don't naturally receive much media attention compared to national politicians, they also aren't the benefactors of grassroots fundraising attention. This opens up the floodgates for lobbyists and PACs to fund campaigns, even among Democrats. Again, this presents an opportunity: even a slight increase in grassroots fundraising for progressive state legislators could make a difference for them.
- **State legislatures are seen as a pipeline for higher office.** Many national politicians start their careers in state legislatures. Twenty-two former U.S. Presidents (including President Obama!), 22 former Vice Presidents, 44 current sitting Senators, and 220 current Congressional representatives served in state legislatures before moving to national office.

Chapter 2. How the Texas legislature works

How to learn about your state elected officials

- Find your state legislators, their official websites, and their office contact info here:
<https://fyi.capitol.texas.gov/Home.aspx>
- Sign up on your legislators' websites and social media platforms to receive regular updates, invites to local events, and propaganda to understand what they're saying. Every legislator has an e-newsletter.
- Find out where your legislators stand on the issues of the day in your community. Review their voting history and their biggest campaign contributors.
- Set up a Google News Alert — for example for “Rep. Bob Smith” — to receive an email whenever your legislators are in the news.
- Research on Google News what local reporters have written about your legislators. Find and follow those reporters on Twitter and build relationships. Before you attend or plan an event, reach out and explain why your group is protesting, and provide them with background materials and a quote. Journalists on deadline — even those who might not agree with you — appreciate when you provide easy material for a story.

Texas legislature 101

This is a general overview of key items to know about the Texas legislature. For specifics and details, we encourage you to refer to the [Texas Legislative Council's guide](#).

- **Legislative sessions occur every other year and start in January and run through May.**
- **The Texas legislature is bicameral.** This just means they have two chambers. The states that are bicameral usually have a “lower” house which has more members that represent smaller geographical areas (like the federal House of Representatives) and an “upper” house which has fewer members that represent larger geographical areas (like the federal Senate). The “lower” house in Texas is called the House, and the “upper” house is called the state Senate.
- **Both chambers have a variety of committees with a variety of functions.** There are three types of legislative committees—substantive, select, and procedural. These committees examine policy issues and generally determine whether or not a bill will get a vote on the floor. (More on this in the next section.) Here is a basic overview:

- **Substantive committees** (sometimes called standing committees) are the standard jurisdiction-based committees, e.g., Agriculture or Transportation and are where almost all bills are referred to. Members will get assigned to the committees in January. You can find the House and Senate standing committees listed on the following websites and learn more about their jurisdictions there:
 - [Texas House Committees](#)
 - [Texas Senate Committees](#)
- Select committees are created on an ad-hoc basis and are convened to address specific policy issues to investigate and issue recommendations. One recent example of the type of work select committees can do is the Texas House’s Select Committee on Mental Health [interim report](#) from several years ago.
- Procedural committees are committees that typically exist to keep the legislative work moving. They are administrative committees that help set the agenda for bills going to the floor or provide a way to quickly move forward uncontested legislation.
- **The Governor has the power to call special sessions:** A “Regular Session” is one that occurs on the schedule mentioned above. If the Governor decides a “Special Session” is needed, however, he can call one at any time and set its duration as well as the topics that will be considered. This authority rests fully with the Governor.

The lifecycle of a Texas bill

Very Briefly: Bills go through three “readings” to pass through a chamber (House or Senate). The first reading is when a bill is first introduced by a state Representative or state Senator into her respective chamber. The bill is then usually assigned to committee(s) which will assess the bill and either not act on it or hold a vote on it (which will often, but not always, occur after a hearing on the bill).

If the bill is reported out of committee to the floor, it undergoes the second reading, which is often when amendments to the committee-reported bill are allowed. The third reading is when the bill is voted on by the legislators for passage. The bill is then sent to the other chamber for consideration. For example, House bills voted for passage after 3rd reading are then sent to the Senate for processing.

If a bill passes both the House and Senate, it is sent to the Governor to be signed into law or vetoed.

Some specifics on how a Texas bill becomes a Texas law

Bills must pass both chambers of a legislature—in identical form—and approved by the Governor in order to become law.

Passing a Bill Out of Both Chambers

- **Getting a Bill Out of Committee:** As a general principle, bills must pass through specialized committees of jurisdiction before they go to the floor of a chamber. This is often where substantive amendments are made (though amendments can often also be made on the floor). Each committee has a chair who exerts a great deal of control over what happens in the committee by deciding things like which bills get heard, which ones never get brought up, and the schedule it all happens on.
 - In Texas, hearings must be noticed to the public—most practically through an online posting on either this website for [Senate hearings](#) or this website for [House hearings](#). (You can also watch committee meetings online by following these links.)
 - For most hearings, committees allow public testimony (and this will be noted in the hearing notices). That means that, in addition to the experts that the committee will ask to give “invited” testimony, ordinary folks like you and me can testify as well. **We’ve provided a lot of tips on how to do this most effectively in Appendix 3.**
- **Getting the House and Senate to Pass *Identical* Bills:** The language passed by the House and Senate must be identical, down to every number, word, and comma. If the chambers pass different versions of the same bill, a conference committee may be called where leadership from each chamber appoints members to serve on a mini-committee tasked with reconciling the differences in the two bills and (hopefully) get each chamber to quickly pass the new version of the bill to send it over to the governor.

The Governor’s Veto Power

Texas’s governor can exert significant power through the [veto process](#):

- The Governor has line-item veto power, but that applies only to spending measures, “only to a bill that contains several items of appropriation.” This allows the governor to veto parts of a budget bill, for example, without vetoing the entire bill.
- Past that, the governor must sign or veto legislation within 10 days of the legislature sending the bill from the statehouse to the governor’s office (excluding Sunday), or it becomes law without his/her signature.

- For legislation transmitted with less than 10 days left in the session, the governor has 20 days **after the legislature goes home** (adjourned) to act, or the legislation becomes law without being signed.
 - This is key: it allows a Governor to veto legislation after the Legislature has adjourned, with no opportunity for the Legislature to override a veto.

How to track a bill

Once you're in the throes of a state advocacy fight, you'll need to be able to track your bill through the legislative process so that you know what committees it's going to, and when there will be hearings. This process can often move fast, so it is essential you use a variety of resources to stay on top of things.

- **Assign a point person.** Even if this really just means you in practice, make sure there is one person in your Indivisible group or coalition who is in charge of staying on top of the bill's status.
- **Take advantage of the Texas legislature's website.** You can register for an account and track as many bills as you like through the legislature's website.
 - You'll get started on the legislature's website: <http://www.legis.state.tx.us>.
 - Click on "My TLO" on the upper-left side. On the drop-down menu that appears, click on Bill Lists. A log-in will pop up.
 - If you do not have an account, you will need to register by clicking "New User?" and make a password. Next you wait up to a minute for a confirmation e-mail to arrive in your Inbox.
 - Tip! If you do not see it, check your Junk Mail until you find the confirmation and then designate the sender, ApplicationsAdministrator@tlc.state.tx.us, on your computer as a Safe Sender for the future House and Senate bill updates that you'll request.
 - You'll be asked to click on a confirmation link and then you should be all good to log-in and get started!
 - Once you are signed in, click on Alerts, and you can put any bill into your list.

- You will get emailed updates on your bill—including when it will have a hearing or be voted on.
- **Contact the bill author’s office.** The person who will know the most about the progress of a bill is the legislator who wrote it. It’s useful to have a contact point in the author’s office that you can check in with whenever you have a question. When you call, ask to speak to the staffer who is working on your bill of interest. Let them know that you are interested in supporting their bill and would like to check in with them regularly about its status. If you are planning to actively oppose a bill, you may not want to tell them that you’re planning to oppose the bill — just ask more general questions.
- **Work with partner organizations.** We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to work with partners.
- **Use a free online legislative tracker.** If the Texas legislature’s website isn’t your style, there are a few free online tools that allow you to follow and track state legislation that you may want to explore:
 - [LegiScan](#)
 - [Fast Democracy](#)

Finally, How to Get Around the Statehouse

Our legislature, especially given the size of our state, is pretty darn big. Unfortunately, as with most big complexes, the best way to learn your way around is to walk the building frequently. But for those of us who can’t do that—or understandably don’t want to—below are some links to helpful maps and directions:

[Capital Building Maps, Directories, and Accessibility Guides](#)

[Capital Visitors Parking Garage](#)

Chapter 3. Organizing in Texas & being a good partner

Join and/or collaborate with other Indivisible groups in Texas

The collective energy of Indivisibles across a state can be powerful. **Joining or coordinating with already-existing groups in your state is a key type of coalition building** — it reduces redundancy, expands your reach, and builds your power.

There are local Indivisible groups in every congressional district across the country, so chances are there is an Indivisible group near you: [Find it here using our group map](#). But: as a warning, many of these groups may be inactive or their contact information may be out-of-date.

For help on reaching out to active Indivisible groups in Texas, feel free to ping us at board@indivisibleaustin.com and we'll help you out as best we can!

If you are already part of an Indivisible group, the next step is to grow and strengthen your group. Organizing takes thoughtful planning and consistent evaluation to make sure your group is as strong as possible. Make it a top priority for your Indivisible group to recruit new members so that you can build power to push for change. Check out these resources to learn how to create, grow, and strengthen your group:

- [Organize locally](#)
- [How to Make New Friends!](#)
- [Building a Great Leadership Team](#)

Connect with—and respect—partner organizations

At all levels of advocacy (federal, state, and local), it is critical that you work in collaboration with value-aligned partner organizations to be a respectful part of the movement and maximize your collective power.

1. **Your Indivisible group may be new to the advocacy space.** Policy experts, Texas state advocates, and other grassroots organizations have been working toward social justice in their communities for decades before the Indivisible movement even began. We must all work intentionally and respectfully with those that have been championing social justice fights before us.
2. **Organizing and advocating in a silo is inefficient.** Indivisibles bring enthusiasm and people power to any advocacy arena, and that is your biggest strength. So find the people already working on your issues and coordinate with them, otherwise you might be getting in each other's way. Combining your time and resources with organizations

that have different strengths means that you and your partners will be most efficient and effective and more likely to win!

3. Be a good partner

- a. **When working with partners that represent marginalized communities (especially when you are not a part of those communities), it is always important to be thoughtful, respectful, and intentional.** Check out [Indivisible Highland Park's blog](#) about how they worked with local immigrant rights groups on a successful effort to make LA a sanctuary city.
- b. **Cultivate transformational relationships.** A transactional relationship is a give-and-take relationship grounded in self-interest, whereas a transformational relationship focuses on building longevity and trust. Instead of talking to partners only when you want to ask for help (transactional), build an ongoing relationship and determine how both of your groups can contribute to the movement (transformational).
- c. **Build strong allyship.** Start by educating yourself and your group on the background of organizations representing impacted communities and the history of their movement. But don't stop there. Next, commit to dismantling the abusive systems and institutionalized practices that have created inequity.
- d. **Don't parachute in.** Parachuting is rushing into the advocacy sphere out of nowhere and taking an authoritative position over marginalized communities that are most impacted. For example, unless you're talking to the groups that regularly work on immigrant rights and serve immigrant populations, you won't know what they consider most important.
- e. **Take an intersectional approach.** Intersectionality refers to individuals experiencing multiple forms of discrimination or privilege that compound each other. It's the idea that the experience of being a woman or of being black is different from the experience of being a black woman. When you are working with partners, be sure to intentionally consider how multiple identities can inform a struggle.
- f. Read our other resources to **learn more about how to build local partnerships** and how to ensure that those partnerships are inclusive:
 - i. [How to form local partnerships](#)
 - ii. [How to build inclusive partnerships](#)

Chapter 4. Making a campaign plan

A campaign plan is a blueprint that will help you stay organized and effective as you work to make an impact at the statehouse.

We've included a sample campaign plan for your use and modifications at Appendix 2 and encourage you to look through that—sometimes the best way to organize your own thoughts is to look at a rubric. But below are some tips as you plan.

Be realistic: you can't do it all

In the current political climate (and unfortunately even longer in Texas), it feels like every value we care about is under attack — but we have to be intentional in deciding how to fight back. A big challenge for new advocates in Texas can be simply choosing what legislation to work on when it's impossible to work on everything.

Prioritize and Make a Small List

You'll need to prioritize in order to maximize your impact. **Even for a group of 20, this usually means selecting only one or two bills or specific policy priorities to organize around.**

Start by creating consensus around the issues your state's Indivisible groups care about; then, identify what bills have been introduced around those issues and where you can have most impact—this may mean you can be effective in helping to get the bill passed, lift up the public profile of an issue, or otherwise be part of a long-term strategic effort.

When doing this, it is very important to connect with aligned issue-based groups that can provide insight into where you can be most helpful and already-existing efforts.

Be Specific

“Immigration” or “Heath Care” is not an actionable priority. Instead, pick an already-existing bill (“Rep. Smith's bill, H.B. 4”) or a specific policy proposal (more funding for postpartum depression treatment for low-income women).

This can be very hard to do, but it is essential to be specific or success will be out of reach.

Building a strategy

After you select your bills or issues to prioritize, you'll develop your overall vision for your advocacy campaign.

1. Define your goal.

It's important to be explicit about your goal. Is your goal to get a bill passed? Is your goal to stop a bill from being passed? Is your goal to move the bill and the conversation around a specific issue forward in a multi-year effort (perhaps through media attention or even just getting a bill through committee?) **This last one will likely be a big part of some Texas Indivisibles' strategy.**

Though specific goals will vary, there's a convenient way to think about each goal you set to make sure you're planning for success. SMART is an easy acronym to think about your goals:

- ***Specific***: straightforward and simple.
- ***Measurable***: include a metric to determine success that can be either qualitative or quantitative.
- ***Attainable***: goals can be lofty, but should remain achievable in that you have the power to make it happen.
- ***Realistic***: similar to attainable, make sure your goal is something you can feasibly work toward
- ***Time-bound***: include a specific frame of time (which can be a specific date or a general timeframe such as "before the end of session" or "before the start of session") that the goal is accomplished within.

You can have more than one goal at a time, but make sure you're intentional in setting each goal, and that you are setting your group up for success by not having too many goals at once.

2. Identify your targets.

Power mapping is an organizing tool used by advocates to identify the most strategic targets that you need to influence in order to accomplish your goal. For each step in your bill's trajectory, you should figure out who has the power to move the bill forward so that you can target your advocacy tactics effectively. Here are some questions to consider while power mapping:

- **To understand who the powerful decision makers are:**
 - Where is the bill in the legislative process?
 - What chamber is it being considered in?
 - Who is the leader of that chamber?
 - What committee is it in?
 - Who is the chair of the committee?
 - Who are the members of the committee?

- **To understand who the other stakeholders might be:**
 - Who is the author of the bill? (likely your ally)
 - Who is working against the change we seek? (likely your opponent)
 - Who is this taking power away from? (likely your opponent)
 - Who has hired lobbyists? (likely to have influence on the fight)
 - Who are the organizational cosponsors? (likely your allies)
 - Have there been previous bills, and who was involved then? (likely to have knowledge that could be useful to you)
 - What communities are impacted? (likely to be stakeholders)

Once you understand who the players are, you should determine where they fall on your spectrum of allies. Are they already on your side, are they adamantly opposed, or are they leaning in one direction? We need not convince our most committed opponents, so much as merely move them towards neutral. Similarly, turning a neutral target into even a weak ally can shift the broader needle on the fight. This type of power mapping exercise allows you to target your strategy to be most impactful.

4. Identify a general timeline.

While you may not know when a bill will be called up before a committee, you do know by what date legislation needs to be filed. You also know key holidays or other events that you could use as a hook for media outreach, social media campaign, or a lobby day.

Also, you know what things **might** happen and you can plan in advance a response. For example, you can set a timeline for what will happen when or if a bill gets a hearing or a vote.

5. Bring all these pieces together to finalize your strategy.

Your strategy is how you will use the resources you have (grassroots supporters in an important district, media savvy, influential partners, ect.) to reach your targets and achieve your goal.

In developing your strategy, you should finalize your target(s) based on your power mapping exercise and determine what is most likely to move them. Generally, your strategy will likely involve moving your legislators through the use of constituent pressure. You should also identify key opponents you may be able to neutralize and key people on the sideline you may be able to get on to your side. Finally, you should explicitly note with whom you will build partnerships.

Choosing tactics

Another vital aspect of your campaign plan is deciding what specific tactics to use at each step. The difference between strategy and tactics is that a strategy outlines *how* you will accomplish your goal, but tactics are the specific actions you will take.

Many of these tactics will be extremely familiar to Texas Indivisibles and include:

- In-District Visits
- Coordinated Calls
- Town Halls (or mock-Town Halls)

For a refresher on these tactics, we encourage you to revisit the original Indivisible Guide and check out how [Indivisible breaks down these tactics for local activists here](#). But really, it is just applying the same principals to new local, members.

In addition, in Appendix 5 we describe some good media tactics when working with statehouse reporters.

Impacting the committee process

One major difference we have as state advocates (as opposed to federal) is the ability to have a much more direct influence on committees considering issues or bills important to you. Especially if your member is on specific committees of interest to you (or, even more importantly, if your member is the chair of a committee), you can wield enormous influence over the fate of the bills heard in those committees by pressuring your member.

In addition to calls and visits to committee members, you can participate in any committee's process as a member of the public by:

- **Giving public testimony at a legislative hearing** (See Appendix 3)
 - Public testimony at a hearing allows you the opportunity to be heard directly by the decision makers who will be voting on a piece of legislation. Texas has different procedures for the House and Senate, which will be explained in this appendix.
- **Submitting written letters of support/opposition to a committee** (See Appendix 4)
 - A coordinated letter about a bill from a coalition of Indivisible groups across the state to a committee can be powerful. Written testimonies often appear in legislative analyses that are written by committees.

A last note on assignments

It may seem like we're pointing out the obvious here, but even if you have a beautiful campaign plan and brilliant tactics...you won't be very effective if people don't understand their roles on the campaigns. We've mentioned the importance of assigning someone to track legislation—whenever possible, clearly identify leaders who will track important information (like bill movement or media coverage) and share with the group and/or coordinate the execution of tactics (such as organizing and reminding folks about coordinated calls).

As volunteer activists, we're all stretched thin. Giving folks clearly defined roles and responsibilities will help everyone move forward the campaign and not go crazy.

Conclusion

"States are the laboratories of democracy." — U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis

We wrote this guide to complement the incredible advocacy work already being done by Indivisibles across our state. Since the 2016 election, Indivisibles have showed up time and time again to demand change from Congress — and we know many of you have already begun to take those same concepts of participatory democracy to your elected officials at all levels.

Our goal is to provide a practical understanding of how the Texas legislature works, and of how we can use our constituent power to both resist harmful federal policies and pave the way for progress at the state level. This is not a panacea, and it is not intended to stand alone.

We look forward to working with you to create a more just society. Onward!

Appendix 1: Key dates for Texas's 86th legislative session

The Texas Legislature will convene for its 86th Regular Session at the start of 2019 through May of 2019. Here are some specific dates to keep in mind.

- **1st day of session:** January 8, 2019
- **60-day bill filing deadline:** March 8, 2019
 - This means that all legislation must be filed (introduced) by this time to be considered.
- **Adjournment sine die:** May 27, 2019
 - **This is when everyone (sorta) goes home**—and all bills, in order to be sent to the Governor, must have been passed in identical form by both the House and Senate.
- **Post-session 20-day deadline for governor to sign or veto:** June 16, 2019
- **Effective date (91st day after adjournment):** August 26, 2019
 - This is when all bills (unless otherwise noted in the legislative text) that have been passed by the legislature and not vetoed by the Governor will begin to carry the force of law.

Appendix 2: Example strategic campaign plan

Part 1: Team

- Groups: List Indivisible groups you work with
- Partner Organizations: List partners you work in coalition with
- Assignments: Who will lead media outreach? Bill tracking? Who will coordinate in-district visits?
 - Note: This doesn't have to be someone in your own Indivisible group! If a partner organization has a listserv where they send out bill updates, fabulous! Just make sure you get permission to be on that list.

Part 2: Goals

Big Picture Goal:

What are you trying to accomplish in your state? What is the specific big picture policy that you're aiming for? Why? Is part of your goal to improve collaboration across Indivisible groups in your state? Is part of your goal to show up as good partners for impacted communities?

Campaign goal:

What is the specific bill, initiative, effort you are undertaking that gets you closer to the big picture goal?

Policy Background

What is the background of the policy or legislation that you are trying to get passed. Give a brief overview. **Do not rely on your own knowledge alone, even if you are an expert: ask allies to weigh in!**

Part 3: Strategy

Legislative Targets

Map out your bill's trajectory. What committees will it be heading to? Who are the key decision makers on those committees? Are there other key decision makers in leadership who may need to be influenced?

Legislative Timeline

When will the bill be moving? Are there key timepoints for action in the legislative calendar that you can identify?

Part 4: Metrics & Tactics

Name and describe the tactics that you'll be using throughout your program. Explain their effectiveness and why they make sense. Use the lists of tactics below to think about different options, and choose the metrics that go with them! Also think about HOW you'll use each tactic and WHEN they make the most sense.

Example Tactics	Example Metrics
Written testimony	XX Indivisible groups across the state submit a written testimony in advance of a committee vote
Oral testimony	XX Indivisible members appear for oral testimony in XX% of committee hearings for the bill
Office visits	XX% of target legislators receive office visits from their local Indivisible groups
Phone calls	XX phone calls from constituents to target legislators in advance of critical votes
Lobby day	XX people attend a lobby day at the capitol
Op-eds	XX op-eds placed in local papers
Letters to the editor	XX letters to the editor placed in local papers
Social media	Our campaign hashtag is mentioned XX times

Part 5: Timeline

- DATE or DATE RANGE
 - Strategy (e.g. Build coalition to work on this legislation/issue)
 - Tactics: (e.g. Outreach to Indivisible groups and partner organizations)
- DATE or DATE RANGE
 - Strategy (e.g. Build media awareness of legislation or issue)
 - Tactics: (e.g. Place op-ed in statewide paper)

- DATE or DATE RANGE
 - Strategy (e.g. Pressure legislators on committee to vote yes on the bill)
 - Tactics: (e.g. Submit written testimony, outreach to indivisible members of committee members to drive local phone calls, appear for oral testimony at committee hearing)
- DATE or DATE RANGE
 - Strategy:
 - Tactics:

Part 6: Resources

What resources do you need to implement your campaign plan and who might be able to provide them to you (i.e. what your coalition has: time, money, skills, materials, relationships, etc?)

<i>Resources Needed:</i>	<i>Who can help:</i>
(e.g op-ed writers)	
(e.g. sample call scripts)	
(e.g. transportation to a lobby day)	
(e.g. graphics for office visits & twitter)	

Appendix 3: Public testimony at a legislative hearing

Public testimony at a hearing is the opportunity to be heard directly by the decision makers and potentially influence the outcome of votes. This is an incredibly **powerful way to shape the outcome of policy** and to share your group’s perspectives on a piece of legislation.

General Procedure

You can submit written testimony as soon as the hearing is noticed, and there will generally be instructions on how to do so on the hearing notice. **If you have any questions, call the committee clerk, who will be listed on the committee’s website with contact information!**

To testify in-person, you will have to check-in either electronically or in-person before the bill you wish to speak on. You will provide your name, if you are testifying for an organization, and if you support or oppose a bill. This is called a “Witness Affirmation Form” or WAF.

The House always uses electronic registration that is completed on iPads located across the capitol ([here is a link that helps explain how to navigate this system](#)), but some Senate committees will allow—or only have—paper registration (WAF) on site at the chairperson’s discretion. **Again, check with the clerk!**

Preparing remarks

It’s a good idea to prepare what you are going to say in your testimony in advance. If you’ve already submitted written testimony, you can use those talking points in your oral testimony.

Be sure that you know the facts about the issue, your reasons for your position, and some rebuttals for common opposition arguments. Also, make sure to **practice** your testimony ahead of time!

Follow this **general outline** for preparing a good oral testimony:

1. Address the committee chairman and committee members.
2. State your name, where you live, and the organization you are representing.
3. Clearly state whether you support or oppose the bill and be sure to identify the bill by its number and author.
4. Summarize your reasons for your position concisely.
5. Share a personal story or anecdote that relates to the issue if you have one.

6. Restate your position clearly.
7. Thank the committee for their time.

Attending the committee hearing

Below are some tips to ensure that your public testimony goes smoothly:

- **Be on time.** On the day of the committee hearing, make sure you arrive to the capitol building early so that you have time to find the appropriate room. Arrive to the hearing room on time.
- **Sign in.** Make sure to double-check House and Senate procedures and follow them.
- **Wait for your bill to be heard.** Bills are not always heard in the order that is written in the agenda and it is often hard to predict when it will be your bill's turn. So you must wait patiently for your bill to be heard.
- **Distribute your materials.** If you did not submit your testimony in advance and wish to, give copies of your testimony to the committee staff for distribution to the legislators. Again, double-check Texas House and Senate procedures.

Giving your testimony

When your bill is up for its hearing, be attentive and listen to the author's presentation. If you have signed up for testimony, wait to be called to the microphone. If there was no sign-in, join the line to speak when the chair calls for witnesses. When you are delivering your testimony, follow these tips:

- Address all inquiries through the committee chair.
- Follow the outline above to deliver your testimony effectively in the allowed 2-3 minutes.
- Be concise, direct, and courteous. Don't ramble or yell. It is okay to be passionate, but do not be disrespectful.
- Do not repeat previous testimonies. If other witnesses have conveyed ideas similar to your testimony, simply say that you agree with previous speakers and reaffirm your position without being redundant.

- Sometimes, legislators may ask questions. Be prepared to answer their questions. If you don't know how to answer a specific question, it is okay to say that you are not sure and that you will follow up with a written answer to their question.

>> Opportunities for People with Powerful Personal Stories

You don't need to be someone who was personally and deeply impacted by the issue that you're testifying about. But if you are personally impacted, you can make a big impact, especially through media.

Introduce yourself to the media. Before your testimony, write an email to reporters you find who have covered this issue. In your email, give a short summary of your personal story. Say you will be working to fight on this bill, and would like to keep in touch. Ask if they will be at the hearing and say you'd like to say hello.

If you have a prepared statement, provide reporters a copy of it. This helps reporters ensure they get the right quote and makes their job much easier for them.

Make sure someone records audio and possibly video of your testimony that can then be sent out to reporters who might be interested in your story but were unable to hear your testimony in person.

Consider writing a letter to the editor or op-ed. Most newspapers have limited space so the more succinct your letter is, the better. You can ask your paper's op-ed editor how long they would like your letter to be but a general guideline is to keep any article under 500 words.

Appendix 4: Written letters to a policy committee

Sending a written letter of your Indivisible group's position directly to a state legislative policy committee is a tried and true method of making your voice heard at the committee level when you cannot be in Austin to testify in person.

Committees keep a list of the written testimonies they receive from various interest groups. Sometimes, portions of your testimony may even be included in formal bill analysis documents that are provided to legislators when they are voting!

Tips for sending a letter to a committee:

1. **Find a template letter.** Oftentimes, supporting organizations that are helping to shepherd legislation through the process will draft template support letters for other aligned organizations to use. These are a great starting point and will reduce your workload! If you've built strategic partnerships like we recommend, you should reach out to your coalition partners to see if there are materials already written for you to use.
2. **Writing a letter from scratch / customizing your letter.** Sometimes, you may not have a template to work from. In this case you'll need to draft a testimony that outlines why your group is supporting or opposing a bill.
 - Do some **research** about the issue that the bill tackles and the provisions of the bill that you support. Don't hesitate to google the bill. Not all bills get a ton of press coverage but some do. Reading op-eds or news articles about the bills are another great way to find out info. Do not lift any information verbatim unless you are sure the text is not copyright protected.
 - Try to **be specific** about how your specific community is impacted and personalize your letter to speak about your own constituency.
 - **Use our template** below to get started on your letter.
 - **Use professional, polite language.** No matter how fired up you are, now is not the time to use rude language or to lecture committee members. State your position and back it up with facts and data. **Take the high road.**
3. **Get other groups to join your effort.** A letter can be even more impactful if it is signed by Indivisible groups from different districts across your state. This will demonstrate how widespread your position is and signals the unity of the grassroots. If possible,

reach out to other groups in your state and ask them to sign on to your letter or send a letter of their own.

4. **Sending the letter.** Different committees have different preferences for how they would like to receive these letters. Some prefer email letters, others like fax, and still others like snail mail. It is usually the best bet to call the office of the committee chair you are sending a letter about and ask for advice on how to send the letter.

Committee Letter Template

> Committee Letter Template

<GROUP(S) LOGO(S)>

To:

<FULL NAME OF COMMITTEE CHAIR>, Chair

<FULL NAME OF COMMITTEE>

<DATE>

Re: <BILL NUMBER> (<LAST NAME OF LEAD AUTHOR>) – <SUPPORT/OPPOSE>

Dear Members of the <COMMITTEE NAME>,

<YOUR GROUP NAME> is pleased to <support/oppose> <BILL NUMBER>, which will <BRIEF ONE SENTENCE OVERVIEW OF WHAT THE BILL DOES>.

<YOUR GROUP NAME> is a grassroots group of energized constituents who are motivated to ensure all families in our state can live healthy and happy lives. We are all volunteers and we come from many different walks of life but are united in our commitment to Texas.

<PARAGRAPH OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROBLEM THE BILL IS TRYING TO SOLVE IN YOUR STATE>

<PARAGRAPH OUTLINING THE PROVISIONS OF THE BILL THAT WILL SOLVE/HARM THOSE PROBLEMS AND WHY YOU SUPPORT/OPPOSE THE BILL>

<YOUR GROUP NAME> strongly <supports/opposes> <BILL NUMBER> and we urge you to vote <in favor of/against> passing this bill out of <COMMITTEE NAME>.

Sincerely,

<GROUP LEADER SIGNATURE>

<GROUP LEADER NAME>

<GROUP NAME>

Appendix 5: Tips on Local Media Strategy

State legislators care enormously about maintaining a good image in their hometown media.

Every legislator wants to generate positive local press coverage that makes them appear hardworking and responsive to their constituents. They want to appear in-touch, well-liked and competent. They want to get local media coverage of their work on certain policy issues whenever possible — and talk about other issues as little as they can. They want to avoid negative attention that suggests they aren't listening to their constituents and are facing backlash, which will make it harder for them to get re-elected. Splashy cable TV shows are nice, but local media is where a state legislator's career lives and dies, and where their legacy matters most. Generating local media coverage forces your legislator and their staff to spend time reckoning with your issues and your stories.

When you can get media coverage of your actions, it increases the impact by orders of magnitude.

>> A note about statehouse reporters

Every state government has a small community of reporters who cover it. These are different than reporters that cover federal issues; it may even be easier to get the attention of state/local reporters. But statehouse reporters are some of the most overworked and under-resourced reporters in journalism. They normally work for print publications and their jobs are always on the chopping block when budget cuts come. They often cover all of the branches of state governments with no help, and normally only have capacity to cover the biggest stories. This means you need to make their job as easy as possible if you want to get coverage.

Remember that reporters want to hear from you. Working with media can seem like a black box if you haven't done it before. Remember: It's somebody's job to tell the story of the bill you are working on or the policy you're trying to change. It's their job to keep track of developments, talk to experts and activists, and write interesting stories that can help illustrate why it matters. You're helping them do their job.

Here are some tips for getting local media for your actions:

1. **Build a media list.** When you get started on your campaign, Google around and read the recent news stories about your state government or your issue. You'll find a lot of the

same reporters' names come up over and over again. Start gathering a list of those names, and look for their email addresses as you go. That's your new "media list"!

2. **Record everything.** We've said it before and we'll say it again: if it wasn't recorded, it didn't happen. Take photos of your group visiting legislators' offices and post them on social media. Take lots of photos and videos of big events you have, and send them to the media after the event if they aren't able to make it.
3. **Make the reporter's job as easy as possible.** Because statehouse reporters are so under-resourced, you need to make it easy AND interesting for them to report on your story. Package everything for them — basically write their story for them. Give them quotes, photos, videos, statements, contact information of other people to call, and pre-packaged stories of how the issue affects real constituents (whom they can then interview) — then boil that down to the snappiest, shortest pitch you can.
4. **Assign a press point person from your group.** If possible, assign one or two people to be in charge of your communication with the media. This ensures that reporters know who to go to when they need something.

(You can learn more about tips and tricks for getting media coverage [here](#).)

You also have some specific media tactics that you can use to bring awareness to your state legislative campaign:

- [Letters to the editor](#)
- [Op-Eds](#)

Using Written Testimony or Letters to Get Press

Did you just draft written testimony or a letter of support or opposition? You just did almost all the work in getting your views in front of the media!

Sending your letter to media covering the state legislature is easy to do. Your letter probably won't get a story written about it. But it may be written about and quoted in future stories.

Alternatively, you could **submit your letter as a Letter to the Editor or Op-ed**. Check your newspaper's website to find the email address for the editorial department you should submit your letter to. At the top of your letter, ask if the paper publishes open letters like this and if they have suggestions for future ones. They may not but it's worth a try!

[Check out our resource on how to build a media list.](#)

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