

November 19, 2025

Non-profit Referrals (“Community Resource List”)

Introduction and Background

In the 117th Congress, the bipartisan Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress recommended that “[t]he House should update and provide clear ethics guidelines to allow district offices to direct constituents to appropriate community organizations, resources, and services.”¹ The recommendation was based on feedback from Members and staff who wanted greater flexibility to be able to respond to constituents seeking direction or a referral to a community agency or organization for non-federal help or assistance, especially where federal assistance may not be available.

Ordinarily, congressional constituent “casework” involves Members serving as a “go-between” or conduit with constituents and administrative agencies of the federal government. However, constituents may, from time to time (especially where federal assistance may not be available) request guidance or help connecting with, or, perhaps, a recommendation or referral to, a community service organization and/or other local resource that may be able to provide non-federal assistance or support in areas such as housing, food, emergency relief, and/or education and training.

In that situation, Members are limited in the assistance or direction they’re able to provide. Specifically, the Members’ Congressional Handbook (Handbook) states, “[o]fficial resources may not be used to advertise for any private individual, firm, charity, or corporation, or imply in any manner that the government endorses or favors any specific commercial product, commodity, or service” (emphasis added).² In essence, Members are prohibited from specifically recommending or referring constituents to an organization to prevent an improper advertisement of the services provided by outside organization using federal resources or improperly implying a House endorsement of a non-governmental organization, charity, or service.

New Committee Guidance – Directing Constituents to a “Community Resource List”

In furtherance of the Select Committee’s bipartisan recommendation to create added flexibility for Members in these circumstances, and in recognition of the practical desire for Members to be as responsive as possible to constituent inquiries, the Communications Standards Commission (CSC) has developed and approved a process for Members, as outlined below, to direct or provide to constituents a list of non-federal community organizations, or a “Community Resource List” (“List”). Specifically, Members may, **if done in accordance with the requirements and processes outlined in this memorandum, compile and host on their official website and otherwise make available, upon request, a “Community Resource List”** to which constituents may be directed for information about available local organizations

¹ See [Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress Final Report](#), Recommendation #153, “Connecting constituents with community organizations and resources,” p. 205.

² See [Members’ Congressional Handbook](#), General, Paragraph 8, p. 6).

offering non-federal assistance and relief. Compiling, hosting, and making available a “Community Resource List” is optional and solely at the discretion of individual Members.

A “Community Resource List” is designed to be an up-to-date, dynamic list of organizations located in and/or serving the Member’s congressional district – most likely, not-for-profit organizations whose primary mission is to provide resources and assistance to individuals – to which Members may refer or otherwise direct inquiring constituents.

The new process recognizes that Members are from time to time asked by constituents for help that may be beyond the scope of their typical casework duties because, for example, the issue is not within the purview of the federal government and/or does not involve a federal issue or program.

Further, this process also recognizes that from a practical perspective, constituents may be unaware of the limitations on Members’ casework capabilities and may view a Member of Congress as an easy “first stop” and logical point of contact for any information about support and assistance that may be available, federal and non-federal, in and near their congressional district.

The List provides an acceptable referral point for Members, allowing them to be responsive to those constituent requests within the bounds of existing law and regulations, e.g., by directing constituents to and/or otherwise providing them with a general list of organizations within and/or serving the Members’ district. The List must be compiled in a way that treats all entities equally and without an implied or explicit endorsement of any particular organization or service and the Member and/or the Members’ family may not be unjustly benefited.

What Organizations May be Included – Qualified Organizations

To be eligible for inclusion on a Member’s “Community Resource List,” an organization or entity must meet the following criteria:

- It must be qualified under Sec. 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code. This is consistent with the May 2024 joint CHA-Ethics Committee guidance provided on “Co-sponsored Constituent Service Events,” which allows Members to partner with qualified outside organizations to co-sponsor local events to provide information and resources to constituents.³ An organization’s qualification under 170(c) can typically be found on the organization’s website or by contacting the organization directly.
- Only organizations with a history/track record of having consistently served constituents in the Member’s congressional district may be included.
- The organization’s primary purpose is to provide support, assistance, and/or relief to individuals in areas such as housing, food, disaster recovery, and/or education and training.
- Explicit prohibition on referrals whereby a fiduciary relationship (i.e. legal) could be created.
- The Committee recommends that Members maintain documentation demonstrating reasonable efforts were made to ensure that each organization meets the listed criteria, including through, for

³ See “[Joint Guidance Regarding Co-Sponsored Constituent Service Events](#),” May 8, 2024, Committee on House Administration, Committee on Ethics.

example, an office form, evidence of Sec.170(c) status, and/or an exchange of emails with the organization.

- Offices may choose to have an ‘in-house’ form they require organizations wishing to appear on the List to complete, similar to casework forms.

Compiling a “Community Resource List”

Community Resource Lists are designed to serve as an objective, fact-based clearinghouse of qualified organizations serving a particular district that may provide non-federal assistance or support to constituents. Lists reflect the fact that Members, by virtue of their position, involvement, and activity in their districts, are likely to know and be aware of available local resources and organizations, and that constituents are equally likely to view Members as a good one-stop resource for such questions, especially when and where federal help may not be available or where local assistance may be timelier.

Using readily available public information, Members may compile and maintain (or, as described further below, through proactive outreach to eligible organizations) a current “Community Resource List” of organizations meeting the criteria described above. Qualified organizations located in or serving the district may also request to be included on the Member’s Community Resource List. While Members ultimately decide which organizations to include, adhering to the general Ethics requirement that constituents and constituent organizations be treated equally is strongly recommended.

The List may include the name of the organization, the organization’s address, and other relevant service and contact information. If providing a link to the organization’s website for additional information, including relevant contact information and background about the organization and its services, the Member’s office must make reasonable efforts to ensure that the link provided does NOT include a prominent donation request.

The organizations may be categorized and listed by the type of assistance provided; for example, “Housing,” “Food” or “Disaster Assistance/Relief.” However, any summary or description of their services should be limited to a brief explanation of the *kind* or *type* of service they provide, as opposed to the details or manner of services, to avoid any appearance of favorable treatment of any particular organization.

The List must include the following disclosure language on the bottom of a printed page or at the bottom of a Member’s official web page, bolded and in no smaller than 14-point type:

“This Community Resource List is intended to provide an informative resource of local organizations that may provide non-federal assistance and/or support to constituents. The inclusion of any organization on this list does not constitute or imply the official sanction or endorsement of Member X or the U.S. House of Representatives of such organization and/or the services provided.”

Communications distributed in non-English languages where the disclaimer above is required may translate the ‘disclaimer’ in the language primarily used throughout the

communication.

Members may communicate with local organizations that they believe may qualify for inclusion on the List to make them aware of the List and to invite them to be included. The communication to the organization should make the qualifying criteria clear, ensure that the organization understands that being included on the List does not imply the official endorsement of the House of Representatives or the Member, and is designed to provide constituents with an informative resource of organizations within the district that may be able to provide assistance in various areas of need.

The List should be regularly maintained and updated to ensure each organization's continued eligibility as a Section 170(c) organization and in meeting the other criteria referenced above. Offices may add/remove/update organizations as needed throughout a Congress, and it is recommended that Members update their List and re-establish qualifying criteria with organizations at the beginning of a congress.

Disseminating a Community Resource List

The Community Resource List is primarily meant to be a “passive” resource, e.g., one that serves as a point of referral and a place to which constituents seeking assistance may be directed. The List must be maintained and publicly available on the Member's website. It cannot be communicated proactively or in an unsolicited fashion via email or other means of mass communication except in the case of federally declared emergencies or disasters as explained below.

It may, however, be provided in response to a constituent who contacts the office seeking guidance on or a referral to local community organizations that may be available to provide various types of support or assistance. For example, a constituent who calls the office looking for local food assistance may be referred to the List on the Member's website. The Member office may also offer to follow up via email to an inquiring constituent with a link to their website and/or a copy of the List.

Offices from time to time may choose to inform their online followers (on all social media platforms) about the List. In doing so, Members must ensure that their posts remain ‘passive’ in nature and link back to their official .gov landing page and/or the List URL on their website. A Member's office may not ‘boost’ and/or use additional official resources to promote the List or any of the organizations listed on their social media.

Casework. The List may also be provided to a constituent and the constituent may otherwise be directed to the List upon the conclusion of a traditional casework matter where, in the judgment of the office, additional resources may be relevant and helpful to the constituent based on the type of assistance requested, especially where federal assistance may not be available. Offices should inform recipients of the List that placing organizations on the community resource list does not constitute an endorsement and/or specific support for listed organizations; rather, the List's sole purpose is to provide information. If offices provide

constituents with a printed copy of the list, they must ensure the disclaimer described above appears at the bottom of the printed document.

Emergency and Disaster Declarations

The Committee recognizes that federal or state declared emergencies or disasters present special circumstances and hardships for constituents where the need for Members to be responsive and informative is particularly acute. Therefore, during the course of a federal (President/FEMA) or state (Governor) declared state of emergency or disaster, Members may proactively distribute and communicate their Community Resource List broadly throughout the district through ordinary means of mass communication. The Communications Standards Commission's (CSC) guidelines on mass communications should be followed to ensure compliance with the CSC's rules, including all relevant approvals.

In accordance with Section 3210(a)(6)(D) of title 39, the Commission may waive the blackout restrictions for unsolicited postal mail sent in response to or to address threats to life or safety. If the resources List is mailed out to constituents, it must display the following disclaimer, in at least 14-point font, **in addition** to the required disclaimers appearing on page 6 of the CSC manual for TV, Radio & Mailers:

“This Community Resource List is intended to provide an informative resource of local organizations that may provide non-federal assistance and/or support to constituents. The inclusion of any organization on this list does not constitute or imply the official sanction or endorsement of Member X or the U.S. House of Representatives of such organization and/or the services provided.”