

THREE STEPS TO SUCCESS

Opportunity Finance Network Member Advocacy Campaign





Three Steps to Success

Over the next six months, Opportunity Finance Network asks every Member to participate in our Three Steps to Success advocacy campaign.

Step One—Connect: Write a letter to each of your newly-elected federal legislators congratulating them on the recent election and introducing your organization. Also write a “welcome back to Congress” letter to your legislators that were not up for re-election.

Step Two—Meet: Ask for a meeting with your Senators and at least one Representative by the end of January. Meet with your elected officials or their representatives to discuss opportunity finance and your work.

Step Three—Follow Up: Add all your elected officials and their key staff to your mailing and e-mail distribution lists. Commit to sending information at least four times a year.



Don't forget to let Opportunity Finance Network know about your letters and meetings so we can follow up in Washington, D.C.

■ Purpose

Federal elected officials need to hear from you. The only way we will accomplish our policy goals is through the grassroots work of our Members. We can make the best arguments we have on Capitol Hill, but what lawmakers really want to hear—and what really convinces them—are real stories from real constituents, and that's YOU!

We want to achieve two things with our Three Steps to Success advocacy campaign. As we launch our new policy agenda for opportunity finance, we need Members to be actively engaged in the legislative process. The government is playing an increasingly bigger role in the daily operation of CDFIs, and we are asking you to get involved for the first time, or to increase your involvement in policy.

Second, if we are to succeed, it is important for you to develop and maintain connections with elected officials at the federal level. If Opportunity Finance Network is to become a leader in economic development, then Members must have local relationships with those who make public policy.

■ Three Steps to Success

Opportunity Finance Network is pursuing a three-step strategy over the next six months:

- ★ **Step One—Connect:** Write a letter to each of your newly-elected officials congratulating them on the recent election. Remember, we will only succeed with bipartisan support, so you need to make sure not to favor one political party over another. If the legislator was not up for re-election, welcome him/her back to Washington, D.C. for the 110th Congress. We ask that you contact both your Senators and at least the Representative where your office is located.
- ★ **Step Two—Meet:** Ask for a meeting with your elected officials or their representatives to discuss opportunity finance and your work, either in Washington, D.C. or the district office. Since the beginning of the appropriations process starts when

the President announces his budget in early February, we ask that you set the meetings by the end of January.

- ★ **Step Three—Follow Up:** Add all your elected officials and key staff to your mailing and e-mail distribution lists.

Write a Letter: One of the easiest ways to communicate with your legislators is to write a letter. As few as three letters on an issue can get a legislator's attention. The letters may not change the elected official's mind, but it's a sufficient number to have a staffer assigned to look into and follow the issue. It is best to fax the letter rather than mailing it because of security precautions on Capitol Hill. You can find your Senators and Representatives addresses and fax numbers at: Senate: www.Senate.gov; House: www.House.gov. You can use the same letter for each elected official, so sending multiple letters is as easy as only sending one!

Our goal is that every legislator in both the House and Senate receive a letter about opportunity finance at the start of this session of Congress.

Meet with Elected Officials: You can meet with your federal legislators in their Washington, D.C. offices if you happen to be there, or you can make appointments to see them in their district offices, when they are visiting "home." The procedures and expectations for either location are basically the same, although it's usually easier to meet with the elected official in the district office. You will generally meet with a staff member during a Washington, D.C. visit.

If you plan a meeting in the local office, it's best to do so during the Congressional "home district work periods" that occur several times a year. Contact Opportunity Finance Network or see the House of Representatives and Senate homepages for more information on Congressional schedules and recesses. Remember, you'll only have about 15-20 minutes during the meeting to make your points, so be prepared.

If you meet with both your Senators and three Representatives, it will only take about two hours of your

plus travel! Since most elected officials have district offices close to one another, with careful planning, you can usually meet with most of your elected officials (or staff) in one day.

Our goal is to have a constituent meeting with every Senator and a majority of Representatives by the end of February.

Mailing Lists: Add all your elected officials and key staff to your mailing and e-mail distribution lists. Make sure to send them your newsletters and annual reports. Getting information about your successes and track record will help elected officials get to know your organization. Don't assume staffers automatically get the mailing sent to the elected official or vice-versa, so it's best to add them all to your lists.

Our goal is for every Congressional office to receive information about opportunity finance from his or her home state at least once a quarter.

Conclusion

Opportunity Finance Network's strategic plan, adopted in 2004, directed us to take the policy offensive. Our policy agenda incorporates our mission, core purpose, and core values, and seeks to promote these to federal elected officials and regulators so that those with political influence can help us further our mission. To do this, we need the help and dedication of every Opportunity Finance Network Member.

Significant change does not happen overnight; it happens one letter, one meeting, and one newsletter at a time. Your commitment to opportunity finance and your willingness to participate in our Three Steps to Success advocacy campaign over the next six months will help us change the mind-set of policymakers to embrace the fact that opportunity finance is a sound investment in our nation's market economy and an issue they should support. Please make a commitment today to bring opportunity finance to every Member of Congress!



Sample Congratulations Letter

[Date]

The Honorable [First Name Last Name]
U.S. Senate [or House of Representatives]
Address

Dear Senator [or Representative] [Last Name]:

Congratulations on your recent victory! I know you will represent the citizens of [Your State] honorably in the 110th session of Congress.

[Paragraph about your CDFI.]

I am contacting you today to make you aware of a vital program for our nation's emerging domestic markets: the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI Fund) in the Treasury Department. This important agency, whose programs have leveraged billions of dollars of private investment into low-wealth urban and rural communities, is essential to our nation's economy. Almost 1,000 CDFIs operate in distressed communities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. CDFIs can be banks, credit unions, loan funds, venture capital funds, community development corporations, or microenterprise loan funds. All are united in their mission of providing financial products and services to customers and communities underserved by traditional financial institutions.

This modest federal program administers the New Markets Tax Credit, oversees the certification process for new CDFIs, provides modest technical assistance, and manages the CDFI Financial Assistance and Native American CDFI Initiative programs.

Under the CDFI Fund's Financial Assistance program, qualified, certified CDFIs may apply for grants through a competitive application process. To access this capital, CDFIs must provide strong documentation of financial soundness and community development mission, demonstrate that any CDFI investment will be matched 1:1 with private and non-federal funds raised by the CDFI applicant, and compete against scores of other applications from other CDFIs applying for the same limited resource. The Treasury Department reports that every \$1 of CDFI Fund investment in a CDFI leverages \$27 in private sector investment,¹ an extremely strong return on taxpayer monies.

[Add in any grants your organization has received from the CDFI Fund and how you used the monies.]

Please feel free to contact me at [phone number] if you have any questions about CDFIs, the programs of the CDFI Fund or the work of [Your CDFI] in [Your State]. Attached is a fact sheet about CDFIs.

Sincerely,

cc: Opportunity Finance Network

¹ CDFI Fund figures available at http://www.cdfifund.gov/impact_we_make/overview.asp



Sample Welcome Back Letter

[Date]

The Honorable [First Name Last Name]
U.S. Senate [or House of Representatives]
Address

Dear Senator [or Representative] [Last Name]:

Welcome back to the start of the 110th Congress! I know you will continue to represent the citizens of [Your State] honorably during this session of Congress.

[Paragraph about your CDFI.]

I am contacting you today about a vital program for our nation's emerging domestic markets: the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI Fund) in the Treasury Department. As you know, this important agency, whose programs have leveraged billions of dollars of private investment into low-wealth urban and rural communities, is essential to our nation's economy, as well as the economy of [Your State]. Almost 1,000 CDFIs operate in distressed communities in all 50 states and are united in their mission of providing financial products and services to customers and communities underserved by traditional financial institutions.

This modest federal program administers the New Markets Tax Credit, oversees the certification process for new CDFIs, provides modest technical assistance, and manages the CDFI Financial Assistance and Native American CDFI Initiative programs. To receive funding, CDFIs must provide strong documentation of financial soundness and community development mission, demonstrate that any CDFI investment will be matched 1:1 with private and non-federal funds raised by the CDFI applicant, and compete against scores of other applications from other CDFIs applying for the same limited resource. The Treasury Department reports that every \$1 of CDFI Fund investment in a CDFI leverages \$27 in private sector investment,¹ an extremely strong return on taxpayer investment.

During the appropriations process this year, we are seeking appropriations for this program of \$80 million. A bipartisan "Dear Colleague" letter will soon be distributed and I hope I can count on your support this year. Last year, 62 Senators signed our letter requesting this amount for the CDFI Fund.

[Add in any grants your organization has received from the CDFI Fund and how you used the monies.]

Please feel free to contact me at [phone number] if you have any questions about CDFIs, the programs of the CDFI Fund or the work of [Your CDFI] in [Your State]. Attached is a fact sheet about CDFIs.

Sincerely,

cc: Opportunity Finance Network

¹ CDFI Fund figures available at http://www.cdfifund.gov/impact_we_make/overview.asp



About Opportunity Finance

Access to capital can give all Americans the ability to own a home or business, pursue economic well being for their families and communities, and secure a safe and more prosperous future. According to a recent national opinion poll,¹ 78 percent of adults support the federal government playing a role in making sure opportunity finance is available for all Americans.

The opportunity finance industry of Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and other private sector financial intermediaries is a critical engine for the nation's economic growth and inclusion. CDFIs are public purpose institutions that combine private market discipline with public missions. They are committed to identifying market gaps and delivering products and services to people and communities not adequately served, and to providing technical assistance that makes customers better able to function in the market economy.

Opportunity financing has resulted in significant numbers of new jobs, jobs preserved, quality, affordable housing units, and new commercial and community facility space in all 50 states. Investors get solid fixed-income returns. People and communities that want to succeed get the opportunity to do so. And critical market segments, many of which will drive our future economic growth, will expand and prosper. CDFIs target these critical market segments including inner cities, remote rural communities, Native American reservations, first-time home buyers, minority, and immigrant populations.

Over the past 30 years, the opportunity finance industry has provided more than \$19 billion in financing that would not otherwise have happened in markets that conventional finance would not otherwise reach. Through fiscal year-end 2004, opportunity finance results included:

- ★ Financing and other assistance for 28,900 businesses that created or maintained 141,000 jobs;
- ★ Building or renovating 317,000 units of affordable housing;
- ★ Building or renovating 4,700 community facilities in economically disadvantaged communities;
- ★ Providing 20,653 alternatives to payday loans and helping 122,755 low-income individuals open their first bank account;
- ★ A net charge-off rate of just 0.55 percent, rivaling the net charge-off ratio of 0.56 percent for all U.S. financial institutions;
- ★ Customers who in 2004 were 53 percent female, 58 percent minority, and 70 percent low income, indicating that CDFIs are reaching new and emerging markets.

¹ Survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation. Interviewing was completed during the period of August 31-September 3, 2006. To view the complete survey, go to: www.opportunityfinance.net.



Sample Appointment Request

[Date]

The Honorable [First Name Last Name]
U.S. Senate [or House of Representatives]
Address

Fax: [fax number]; **Please deliver to [Appointment Scheduler or Executive Assistant's name].**

Dear Senator [or Representative] [Last Name]:

For Washington, D.C. Visit: I will be in Washington, D.C., on [Date] and would like to meet with you during my visit to tell you about the work that [Your CDFI] is doing in [Your State].

For District Office Visit: I understand that you will be back in [Your State] on [Date]. I would like to meet with you during the Congressional break at your district office in [District Office City] to tell you about the work that [Your CDFI] is doing in [Your State].

[Your CDFI] is [description of organization]. We are also a certified community development financial institution (CDFI). [If applicable.]

My organization is a member of the Opportunity Finance Network, a national network of more than 160 financial institutions. Its members include CDFIs and other opportunity finance institutions that work just outside the margins of conventional finance to bring those markets into the economic mainstream and to help the economic mainstream flow into those markets.

I hope to talk with you about [Your CDFI] and the CDFI Fund, a program in the Department of the Treasury that has allowed us to [describe growth or new program].

I would like to schedule a meeting [at any time on (date) OR between (hours you are available if your time is limited)]. You can reach me at [Phone] to confirm a time for my visit or if you need additional information. I will follow up this request in the next few days to find out when we can meet.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

cc: Opportunity Finance Network



Sample Meeting Script

You have reviewed your Senator's biography and the Opportunity Finance Network talking points on issues. The Senator is not on the Appropriations Committee, but is senior in the legislature, is in his fifth term, and is a high-ranking member of the Small Business Committee. His biography indicates that he is on the board of a local arts organization.

Your goal is to ask for the Senator's support for CDFI Fund appropriations.

1. Introduce yourself, give background on opportunity finance, and note that the primary topic of the meeting is the CDFI Fund.
2. Provide a brief borrower example that focuses on funding a nonprofit arts facility (like the one the Senator supports) or a small business start up.
3. Mention the assistance your organization has received from the CDFI Fund and the ways it has helped your organization and the state. Give brief, specific examples: provided X number of jobs, built X number of affordable housing units, etc.
4. Close with the "ask" that the Senator support \$80 million for the CDFI Fund, and contact the Chair of the Appropriations Committee with his support.
5. Make sure to thank the Senator for meeting with you.
6. Always follow up with a thank-you letter after the meeting.



CONTACT US

If you have questions about the Three Steps to Success advocacy campaign or need additional information, please contact us:

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