

10 Simple Things We Can Do to Get Our Communities to Vote!



Voting is an important way to build power in our communities and get the changes we need. We're all strapped for time, but here are some easy ways to get our communities involved.

- 1. Make voter registration and education a part of your ongoing activities such as: membership enrollment; registration for programs; intake or exit interview processes. Add to your forms: "If you are not registered to vote where you now live, would you like to register today?"**
- 2. Put up signs in your office announcing "Register to Vote Here" or "Election Information Here."**
- 3. Have voter registration forms and voter education materials available in your offices and at all meetings and events.**
- 4. Have outreach workers do voter registration and education.**
- 5. Get volunteers and clients to help.**
- 6. Send out information in your newsletters and e-mails about voting. Include links and other resources for more information on the issues and where to register to vote.**
- 7. Call your members or clients and remind them to vote. You can also give them election information at the same time, such as what important issues are on the ballot and where to find their polling place.**
- 8. Have contests to see who can register or talk with the most voters. Use small gifts as prizes to make it fun.**
- 9. Organize a community forum on issues that will be addressed in the election.**
- 10. Talk to your peers in other community groups, and encourage them to involve their constituents in the democratic process.**



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Five Advocacy Opportunities for Anti-Hunger Organizations

- 1. Mailing List:** Add your local, state and federal elected officials to your organization's mailing list. Make sure that all on-line newsletters, reports and mailings are sent to them as well.
- 2. Site Visits:** The best way to give elected officials a true picture of what your agency is accomplishing is to invite them to come and observe for themselves! Better yet, involve them in an activity—serving lunch at a Summer Food Site, reading to children in afterschool meal programs, etc. You have the “home-court” advantage and usually the official is more relaxed than if you were to visit with them in their office. If you have difficulty getting the member to commit to visiting your agency, invite the media or give the official some type of official recognition (framed certificate or the like).
- 3. Scrap Book/Photo Album:** If you cannot get your official to tour your site—bring the site to them! Options include taking photographs and making them into postcards to send to elected officials. Or using the creative talents of some of your volunteers to create a “scrap book/photo journal” that documents in pictures what you are accomplishing (or the face of those still in need). We've seen many Congressional offices displaying such albums in their reception areas.
- 4. Conference Calls – Staying Connected:** Many local and small agencies do not have the resources to get to the State House or to Washington, D.C. Have your statewide coalition or others who are attending conferences and meetings at the State Capital or in Congress to bring you along via conference calls. Most offices have speaker phones with the capacity to include multiple callers. You will need to do a little “pre-scripting” beforehand to make sure that everyone is on message and truly adding to the discussion.
- 5. SNAP/Food Stamp Challenge:** Across the nation elected officials, religious leaders, anti-hunger advocates and others have opted to take the “SNAP/Food Stamp Challenge” (eating only what can be purchased with an average food stamp allotment for a week). Invite your Members and their staff to take the Challenge, or to join you and others on a shopping trip to the local grocery store to see just how much the average food stamp allotment buys. Encourage community leaders to take the Challenge. For a link to FRAC's Food Stamp Challenge toolkit and other information on the Challenge, go to the FRAC website, www.frac.org.

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FRAC's Tips for Lobbying Visits

Arranging Your Hill Visit:

- ✓ **Call ahead** to schedule an appointment with your Member or the Congressional Aide assigned to work on your specific issue. Requests to meet with Members may need to be in writing. All information can be found through your Member's website, www.house.gov and www.senate.gov. The Capitol switchboard is (202) 225-3121.
- ✓ **Know some background info on your Member.**
 - Do some research: look up your Member's biographical information, resume, congressional committee assignments, caucuses joined, etc.
 - Study voting records.
- ✓ **Prepare a concise one-page fact sheet to leave behind.** The fact sheet should be simple and to the point. You can include any of the following suggestions:
 - Descriptions of the problems you want solved and specifically what actions you want the elected official to take to solve them.
 - Information about your organization – services you provide or impacts your program has in the District/State.
 - Local press clippings.
 - Photographs and easy-to-understand charts and graphs that make your point. If you have been unable to get your Member to visit your agency, prepare a scrapbook or photo album that captures the services you provide.
- ✓ **Research opposing views and prepare talking points that address these concerns.**
 - Know how to respectfully counter an argument that disagrees with your position and back up your position with facts and statistics; avoid moral or emotionally-charged arguments.

Pre-Visit Checklist:

- ✓ **Focus on the purpose of your visit and be organized.**
- ✓ **Choose one person to serve as a facilitator for the meeting** - This person will make introductory remarks and ask members of the group to introduce themselves.
- ✓ **Be on time.**
- ✓ **Be patient** – Often your Member/aide will be late because of a hearing, committee meeting, voting session, etc.
- ✓ **Be prepared** – If your appointment gets cut short, make sure you have a "2-minute elevator ask." (This will be your "quick" pitch if you run into your Member on an elevator!)

During Your Visit:

- ✓ **Determine the amount of time the group will have with the Member/Aide.**
- ✓ **Introduce all members of the group** - Unless you're an extremely large group, be sure every person has something to add to the discussion.
- ✓ **Stay on topic.** Keep the presentation simple and straightforward and present your issues briefly and persuasively.
- ✓ **Emphasize the District/State.**
 - Talk about local examples and the impact your work has in your community.
 - Relate a specific incident or story that describes the issue/proposal and how it will affect your district, business, the people you serve -- your community.
- ✓ **Be Specific.**
 - Have the specific bill/bill number/proposal with you that you want to discuss.
 - "The Ask" - Be specific about what you want your Member to do (e.g., sign letter to the President, cosponsor legislation, vote against/for a bill/proposal).
 - Make sure your Member knows your future plans and what you expect from him or her.

Post-Visit Checklist:

- ✓ **Have a follow-up plan to monitor progress and build a relationship.**
 - Send a thank you note for the meeting.
 - Send any relevant information requested during the meeting.
 - Add your Member to your mailing list (newsletters, press releases, invitations to local events).
 - Invite your Member to visit your agency or tour your facility.
 - Keep in touch regularly with your Member and send studies, reports and news items related to your program.

General Do's and Don'ts of Lobbying

Do	Don't
1. Tell them you're a constituent or have programs that serve constituents	1. Make long speeches
2. Demonstrate your broad community-based support	2. Ignore the staff- they have lots of knowledge and influence
3. Be brief and listen respectfully	3. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." You can always research information and get back to them.
4. Find common ground	4. Be partisan or argumentative
5. Focus on specific issues/proposals, not vague goals	5. Forget to invite the Member to visit your program and follow-up after the meeting
6. Keep the long-term perspective	6. Forget "The Ask" during the meeting (be specific)
7. Tailor your remarks and presentation to the time allotted	7. Forget to thank the Member/Aide for their time, even if they don't agree with your position – there's always a next time!

Emailing Hill Staff:

Email addresses of House and Senate staff usually* follow the format below:

House staff – First name[dot]last name[at]mail[dot]house[dot]gov
(e.g., Jane.Doe@mail.house.gov)

Senate staff – First name[underscore]last name[at]Senator's last name[dot]senate[dot]gov
(e.g., Jane_Doe@Lugar.senate.gov)

*Sometimes Committee staff use a slightly different format with the name of the committee in the email address (e.g., Jane_Doe@agriculture.senate.gov).