



# Advocacy 101

## Toolkit:

### Montana State Legislature

Montana Food Bank Network

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This toolkit provides background on the current status of hunger in our state, the Montana State Legislature, and the legislative process. The toolkit outlines advocacy strategies and offers ideas on how to adapt advocacy tactics to your organization's priorities. You will also find guidance on the differences between advocacy and lobbying, including lobbying limitations for non-profit organizations, or individuals affiliated with state and federal agencies.

This toolkit will be a living document that will adapt and be updated according to our states' changing needs over time. Any questions regarding information in the toolkit, or requests for further logistical guidance and information around advocacy can be directed to Wren Greaney, MFBN Advocacy Coordinator, at [wgreaney@mfbn.org](mailto:wgreaney@mfbn.org).

# WHY ADVOCATE?

Organizations involved in anti-hunger efforts and individuals grappling with food insecurity play important roles in educating lawmakers and advocating for fair public policy. By living and working on the ground in communities, you have a unique perspective that legislators should consider when enacting policies that will impact low-income Montanans.

## LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVOCATES

You can advocate as an individual for issues impacting your life! Although advocacy by an array of professionals and community members drive holistic messaging and appeal to legislators, individuals and families with lived experience of poverty and food insecurity have some of the most impactful voices in anti-hunger advocacy. Those who struggle to put food on the table truly understand how anti-poverty policies will impact their needs. Personal experiences and opinions are vital to influencing policy, while creating a more inclusive democracy.

## ADVOCATING AS AN ORGANIZATION

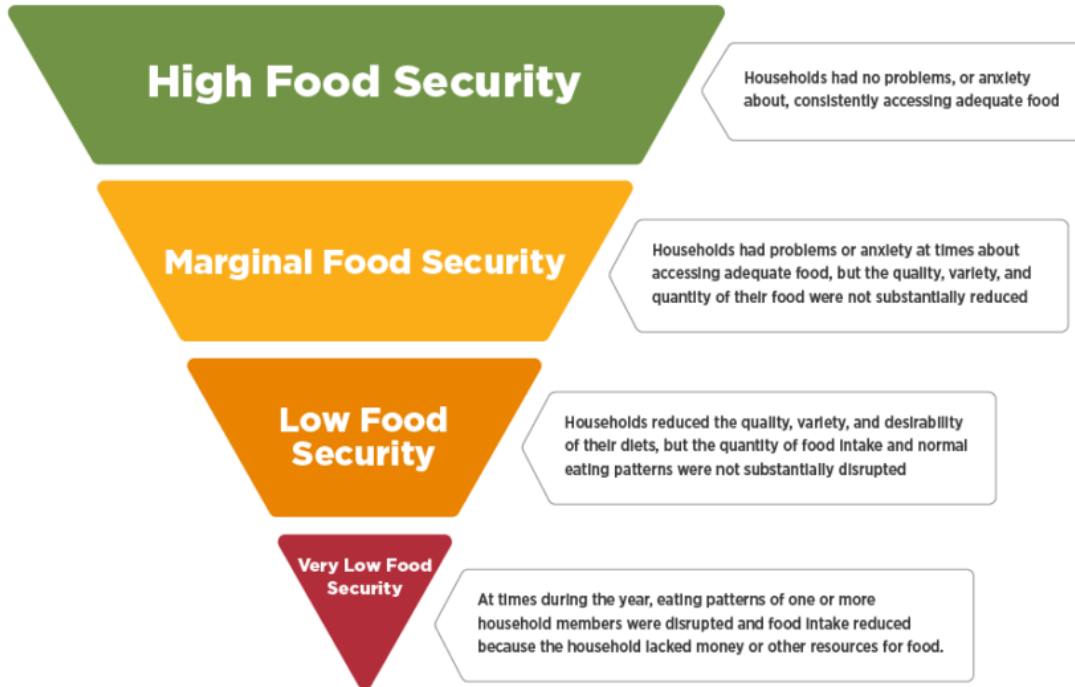
Many state agencies find themselves with decreased budgets, while state workers and nonprofit organizations face increased numbers of people relying on their programs and services. As providers witnessing the need of Montanans, you have an important voice to improve social equity. As an organization or agency, you can educate lawmakers and the public about your experience, the challenges facing those you serve, and opportunities to better address the needs of your community. This education is a crucial step to impacting change, even if you are not able to fully engage in lobbying efforts. Additionally, you provide information that others may use in their own lobbying efforts.

By collectively supporting, opposing, or educating on a bill, our different voices and sometimes unlikely allies ensure we address an issue from multiple angles. Important voices to consider engaging in the fight to end hunger include:

- Healthcare professionals
- Public health representatives
- State agency representatives from public food and health programs
- Food pantries and other emergency food providers
- Providers and programs serving seniors
- Farmers, ranchers, and other producers
- Local food and Farm to School experts
- Faith based community
- Other community organizations such as United Ways, YMCAs, Early Childhood Coalitions, etc.
- Representatives from schools and education
- Mental health professionals
- Disability rights community
- Tribal health and other representatives from Native communities
- Nutrition experts

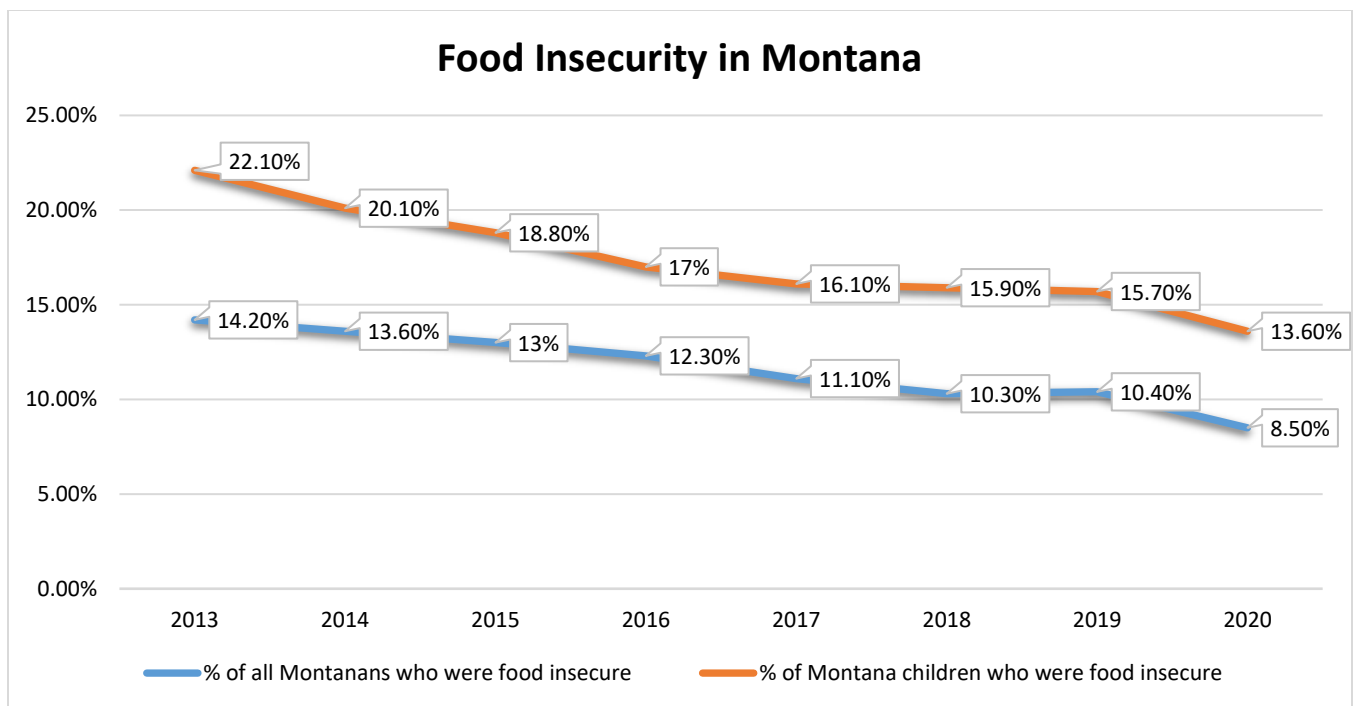
# FOOD INSECURITY IN MONTANA

Food insecurity is the inability to access food in a consistent manner, resulting in reduced quality and variety of diet. A household's level of food insecurity can vary, with more severe cases leading to skipped meals and reduced food intake.



Source: Adapted from the USDA Economic Research Serv

In 2020, 1 in 12 Montanans, including approximately 31,000 kids (1 in 7) lived in food insecure homes. Food insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time, but rather food insecurity may reflect a household's need to make trade-offs between important basic necessities, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritious foods. Fortunately, the level of food insecurity in the state of Montana has been decreasing since numbers peaked following the Great Recession. Food insecurity even decreased from 2019 to the challenging year of 2020, largely due to enormous and unprecedented public and private responses to the initial Covid-19 crisis. However, that decrease was not equally distributed across racial and ethnic differences: available data indicates that food insecurity actually increased between 2019 and 2020 in Montana's Latino population. Now, Montana is seeing a surging need for food assistance, as Montanans face high costs and need for food.



## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FOOD INSECURITY

### *Poverty & Economic Insecurity*

In Montana, 12.4% of residents live in poverty, or about 130,700 individuals, including about one in seven Montana children. Single mother households have a poverty rate of more than one in three families. Additionally, across Montana, over 36% of American Indians live in poverty.

Poverty is a leading contributor of food insecurity, because families and individuals living below the poverty line, which is an income of just over \$2,300 per month for a family of four, lack financial resources to buy adequate food, as well as pay for basic needs like housing, healthcare, transportation, utilities, incidentals, and emergency situations.

**Insufficient wages** are a main contributing factor to economic insecurity. In Montana, almost 42% of SNAP households are working. The minimum wage is \$9.20 per hour, but studies show for a family of four with two full-time working parents and two children, a living hourly wage would need to be \$23.85 per hour, per parent (Source: MIT Montana Living Wage Calculator). Workers that receive SNAP are often employed as CNAs, home health aides, cashiers, cooks, or retail salespersons.

**Unemployment** also contributes to poverty. In 2021, Montana's average unemployment rate was 3.4%, but on reservations, it ranged from 4% on the Flathead Reservation, to 11.5% on the Crow Reservation. Additionally, many Montana workers are **underemployed**, meaning they work jobs that are low-wage, part-time, have inconsistent hours, or are seasonal.

**Childcare** is a significant expense for many families. A typical Montana family spends approximately 30% of their total income on childcare. (Economic Policy Institute).

**Healthcare Costs.** In 2021, the uninsured rate in Montana was approximately 8.2%. Approximately 115,000 Montanans have healthcare coverage through the Montana HELP Plan (Medicaid Expansion), but many families continue to face high healthcare costs.

**Housing** is often the largest expense for a household. Housing is considered affordable when rent or a mortgage payment is less than 30% of the household's monthly income. For Montana households in 2021, 42.2% of renters and 27.7% of homeowners with a mortgage spent 30% or more of their monthly income on housing.

### *Low Participation in Nutrition Programs*

The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**, or SNAP, assists many Montanans with the cost of food. As of 2021, about 97,200 Montanans (9%) participated in the SNAP program each month. Our state's average benefit is about \$158 per person per month, or just \$1.73 per meal. According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap, the average cost of a meal in Montana in 2020 was \$2.98.

Despite these shortcomings, SNAP is an incredibly effective anti-hunger program and economic stimulus. Yet not all who are eligible actually utilize the program due to a variety of reasons, such as stigma and stereotypes around using public assistance, lack of transportation, low access to Offices of Public Assistance, or a lack of knowledge or misunderstanding around the program. In 2019, 79% of eligible individuals participated in SNAP in Montana, which is the 18<sup>th</sup> lowest participation rate in the nation. SNAP participation for seniors is much lower, with approximately 1 out of eligible 3 seniors participating.

**WIC** or Women, Infants, and Children, provides counseling, nutrition, education, breastfeeding support, health screenings, and food benefits to pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children up to five years old. Montana has consistently had one of the lowest WIC participation rates in the nation.

The **National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs** provide breakfast and lunch to kids at school. Meals are available for free or at a reduced rate for eligible children. Nearly half of Montana students qualify for free or reduced priced meals, and 90% of schools that offer national school lunch also offer breakfast. However, only 61% of students who eat school lunches in Montana also eat school breakfasts. A program that increases participation in school meals is CEP, or Community Eligibility Program, which allows high need schools to serve meals at no charge to all students. Research shows that CEP schools see higher participation rates in school meals.

The **Summer Food Service Program** or SFSP, provides free meals to kids during the summer months at eligible community sites. Sites are often at schools or parks and are open to all children through age 18. While SFSP participation continues to grow from year to year, it remains underutilized across the nation as many children do not have a local site, or lack the transportation or supervision needed to access a program.

## CONSEQUENCES OF CHILDHOOD HUNGER

### *Physical Growth, Mental Development, and Overall Health*

Chronic hunger has negative consequences that follow kids throughout their lifetime. Children that experience chronic food insecurity have higher stress levels, poorer immediate health outcomes, and are at higher risk for chronic disease. Food insecure kids have low access to healthy and affordable food that provides them with the nourishment they need to learn, grow, and develop into adults.

### *Ability to Succeed in School*



Hunger also results in higher levels of school tardiness and absenteeism, higher rates of poor social behavior in school, lower math and reading scores, and lower rates of both high school graduation and pursuing post-secondary education. Children's participation and success in school is often directly related to their success in life, and they cannot properly learn and perform in school without access to healthy food.

### *Economic Impact on Schools, Public Health, and the Future Workforce*

Ultimately, child food insecurity results in increased healthcare costs, lost work time for parents, and decreased skills and education for children trying to reach economic self-sufficiency later in life. Child food insecurity not only has physical, social, and emotional costs for kids, but it has long-term negative financial implications on entire communities and our society as a whole.

The good news is that childhood hunger is solvable. We can address childhood hunger and the factors that contribute to it by educating our elected officials and advocating for policies that support healthy and strong Montana families.

# MONTANA STATE LEGISLATURE 101

## THREE BRANCHES

In Montana, as in all states, the state government is modeled after the federal government. It has three branches, which have specific powers and limits to ensure that no single branch ever gains too much power:

- The **legislative branch**, which is Congress at the federal level and the Montana Legislature at the state level. The Legislature is responsible for making the laws needed to address state level issues.
- The **executive branch** is headed by the President at the federal level and the Governor at the state level. The executive branch implements laws passed by the Legislature, but the Governor also has the authority to veto any law passed by the Legislature. The Legislature can override a veto with a two-thirds vote.
- The **judicial branch**, which encompasses the court system, interprets the laws and settles any differences of opinion about what laws mean and how they should be applied. Even if the Governor and the Legislature agree on a law, the courts may find it violates the state or U.S. constitution.

## TWO CHAMBERS

The Montana Legislature is a **bicameral** legislature. That means it has two chambers: the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives**. Each chamber considers bills, or proposed laws, independently. For a bill to become law, it has to pass both the House and Senate in a series of votes, and be approved by the Governor.

## 150 MEMBERS

Montana has **100 Representatives** and **50 Senators**, elected by residents, known as **constituents**, within their **district**. There are 100 House districts and 50 Senate districts. Each Senate district includes two House districts. Each constituent is represented by one Senator and one Representative.

- **Districts.** District boundaries are based upon population, not area. The districts are determined every 10 years after the new U.S. Census report is released. Each district must have about the same population. A county with a small population may share House and Senate districts with other counties. Counties with large populations may contain several districts within their boundaries.
- **Term Limits.** Montana restricts how long Senate and House members may serve: no more than 8 years in a 16-year period.
- **Elections.** Senators serve four-year terms, and every two years half of the Senate members face re-election. Representatives serve two-year terms, and all vie for re-election before every new session.

## 90 DAYS / ODD-NUMBERED YEARS

The Montana State Legislature, which includes the House and Senate, meets in **regular session** for 90 working days in every odd-numbered year. Each session begins, or **convenes**, on the first Monday in January, unless it's New Year's Day, and typically ends, or **adjourns**, in late April. In addition to its regular sessions, the Legislature also may meet in **special session** to deal with pressing issues. Only the Governor or a majority of legislators can call a special session.

**Session (or Standing) Committees.** Standing Committees are legislative panels that meet during every regular session to consider and hold public hearings on bills in a specific policy area. Each Senator and Representative is assigned to at least one standing committee each session. During the months between sessions, **interim committees** also meet to study specific issues and consider whether to recommend new legislation during the regular session. Only select members work on the interim committees.

## LEADERSHIP

The party with the most elected members within their chamber is referred to as the **majority party** and predominantly controls the legislative process, such as when bills will be considered in committee or on the floor. The party with the second highest member count is the **minority party**. Each party appoints members to **leadership positions** to represent the party's priorities in the chambers. Here is a quick list.

In the Senate:

- **President of the Senate** is the chief administrative officer for the Senate, which maintains order on the floor, handles administration and management of the Senate and staff, certifies acts and records, and oversees referral of bills to committees and request for fiscal notes. *The President is always from the majority party.*
- **Senate Majority Leader** is the lead speaker in floor debate, makes procedural motions during floor sessions and assists in monitoring and scheduling bills.
- **Senate Minority Leader** is the minority party's leader in the Senate and develops the minority position and negotiates with the majority party.
- **Party Whips.** Each party also has one or more whips, who make sure members are present at moments of importance to the party and helps the party accomplish its goals.

In the House of Representatives:

- **Speaker of the House** is the chief administrative officer of the House, who maintains order on the floor, handles administration and management of the Senate and staff, certifies acts and records, and oversees referral of bills to committees and request for fiscal notes, and sets the agenda for second and third reading. *The Speaker is always from the majority party.*
- **House Majority Leader** is lead speaker in floor debate, makes procedural motions during floor sessions and assists the Speaker with monitoring progress of and scheduling bills and with policy development.
- **House Minority Leader** is the minority party's leader in the House and develops the minority position, negotiates with the majority party and makes recommendations for the assignment of minority committee members and presiding officers.
- **Party Whips.** Each party also has one or more whips, who make sure members are present at moments of importance to the party and helps the party accomplish its goals.

Source: Montana State Legislature Website, <https://leg.mt.gov>

# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

The Legislature is responsible for making laws to address citizens' and state needs, such as public services, state finances, and issues of safety and security. When a bill is proposed to amend an existing law, to create a new law, or to request funding, the House and Senate must pass the same bill, including any amendments from the other chamber, before sending it to the Governor to be signed into law or vetoed. The legislative process may seem overwhelming and lengthy, but each step along the way provides opportunities for citizens to become involved and voice their support or concerns with the legislation. We have laid out the steps below.

## FROM IDEA TO LAW

Only legislators may introduce bills. But where do legislators get the ideas for the bills they propose?

- **Individual Legislators.** Members utilize their own expertise and personal experience to guide their legislative prerogatives.
- **Constituents.** Citizens and groups often educate members on important issues and concerns, in order to bring awareness to the area and/or to request the member sponsor legislation to address the concerns.
- **Media.** Stories in the media may also bring issues to legislators' attention.
- **Government Agencies.** The executive agencies that administer state programs and services may see a problem that might be solved through legislation. Employees of these agencies may approach legislators and ask them to sponsor bills to address the problems.
- **Interim Committees.** These legislative committees meet between sessions to study certain topics in depth. They may decide to introduce legislation as a result of their studies.
- **Interest groups.** Interest groups may represent single issues, trades, professions, or social groups. Some examples are groups that represent labor, business, teachers, farmers, low-income people, and veterans. Because interest groups usually have greater resources than individuals, they can be very effective in urging legislators to propose bills.
- **Court Decisions.** If a court finds a problem with a law or finds a law to be unconstitutional, legislators may decide to try to fix the problem with new legislation.
- **Other States.** If there is no clear solution to a problem, legislators may ask their staff to research how other states have addressed similar issues.

## FROM BILL TO LAW

### I. Introduction

Once legislators have crafted a bill, they submit, or introduce, the bill into their respective Chambers. Sometimes Senators and Representatives develop bills on the same issue and introduce them separately in their Chambers. Note, if funding is requested in a bill, then it must originate and be passed in the House before the Senate can consider it. If the bills introduced in both chambers do not differ, then they are referred to as identical. If the bills have the same aim, but differ in some ways, then people use the vernacular "Senate version" and "House version" to refer to the bills.

After introduction, a bill is assigned a number and read to the chamber for its "**First Reading**" then assigned to a relevant committee based on its subject matter.

## II. Committee Consideration

Once a bill is assigned to a committee, the **Chair** of the Committee, who is a member of the majority party appointed to run the committee, schedules a **public hearing** on the bill. These hearings are the most effective way for citizens to express their opinions about bills.

- **Public Hearing.** The purpose of a hearing is to listen to the concerns and recommendations of the public, **lobbyists** (a representative of an interest group), and other legislators. At the hearing, the public is invited to **testify** for or against the bill. Those that favor a bill are called **proponents**. Those that oppose a bill are called **opponents**.
- **Amending a bill.** Following the hearing, the Committee may amend a bill by calling for a vote on amendment(s) proposed by members. An **amendment** is a proposed change to the bill, such as an addition or deletion. If the amendments pass, then subsequent actions will consider the bill as amended.
- **Executive Action.** The Committee then takes **executive action** by holding a vote to pass, not pass, or table the bill. At this point, only members of the Committee vote on the bill. All actions require a simple majority vote.
  - **Passes.** If a majority of the Committee members vote in favor of the bill, then it passes and moves out of committee for further debate and consideration by all members of the chamber.
  - **Fails or Does Not Pass.** If the bill fails to get a majority of votes for passage, then it does not pass and will not receive further consideration. The bill has “**died in committee**”.
  - **Tabled.** If the bill is tabled, then it has been set aside for consideration at a later date. This often “kills” the bill quietly, because if the Committee does not consider the bill again within 45 days then the bill cannot receive further consideration and “dies in committee”.
- **Committee Report.** After executive action, the committee reports if the bill has passed or failed. If the bill passes, then it is placed on the **second-reading calendar** for the whole chamber, or “**Committee of the Whole**”.

## III. Floor Consideration

**Second Reading.** Once the bill has passed the Committee and is placed on the second reading calendar, leadership decides when a bill will be considered by the full chamber. The second reading begins debate by the Chamber.

**Debate & Amendments.** During debate of a bill, members may offer arguments and amendments on the floor. If amendments are offered, the full chamber votes on each one separately.

**Second Reading: Vote.** After debate and the amendment process concludes, all members in that chamber vote to pass or not to pass the bill as amended. If the bill is defeated, meaning it fails to get a majority vote for passage, then it drops out of further consideration. If the bill passes, then it is placed on the **third-reading calendar** of the same chamber.

**Third Reading: Vote.** The Chamber again votes on the bill as amended; however, no debates or amendments may be offered during this time. If the bill is defeated, then it can no longer be considered by the Legislature. If the bill passes, it is transmitted to the other chamber.

#### *IV. Transmittal & Repeat*

**Transmittal.** If a bill passes all votes in its initial chamber, then it is transmitted to the second chamber to repeat the legislative process again:

- Introduction: First Reading and Committee Assignment
- Committee Consideration: Debate, Amendments, Executive Action (Vote to Pass, Not Pass, or Table)
- Floor Consideration: If passes committee - Second Reading, Debate, and Amendments
- Third Reading: If passes second reading - vote on final bill.
- Final Passage: Identical to or differing from first chamber's bill?

**Identical Bill.** If the bill passed by the second chamber is identical to the bill passed by the first chamber, then the legislative process is done, and the bill will be sent to the Governor for final approval.

**Differing Bills.** However, if the bill passed by the second chamber includes amendments to the bill passed by the original chamber, then additional legislative steps, referred to as **reconciling differences**, must be completed before the bill may be sent to the Governor for final approval.

#### *V. Reconciling Differences*

If the bill passed by the second chamber includes amendments to the bill passed by the original chamber, then two options may occur:

- The first chamber accepts the changes by passing the second chamber's bill as amended, and the bill continues to the Governor for final approval; or,
- The first chamber rejects the second chamber's bill and calls for the second chamber to (a) vote on the bill without amendments again, or (b) to negotiate a compromise bill through a conference committee.

**Conference Committee.** If (a) the first chamber rejects the second chamber's changes, and (b) the second chamber refuses to pass the first chamber's bill unamended, then the chambers appoint members to a conference committee to negotiate the differences and to develop a compromise bill.

**Compromise Bill.** If the conference committee cannot iron out differences, then the bill dies. If the conference does develop a compromise bill, then each chamber will vote to pass or not pass the compromise bill.

**Final Vote.** If either chamber fails to pass the committee's agreed upon version of the bill (compromise bill), then the bill dies. If the bill passes both chambers, then it becomes an engrossed bill and is sent to the Governor for final approval.

#### *VI. Governor's Final Approval*

Once the Legislature passes a bill through both chambers in the same form, it is sent to the **"Governor's desk"** for final approval. The Governor has four options:

- Sign the bill, passing it into law.
- Take no action, and the bill will become law in 10 days.
- Recommend amendments to the bill.
- Veto the bill.

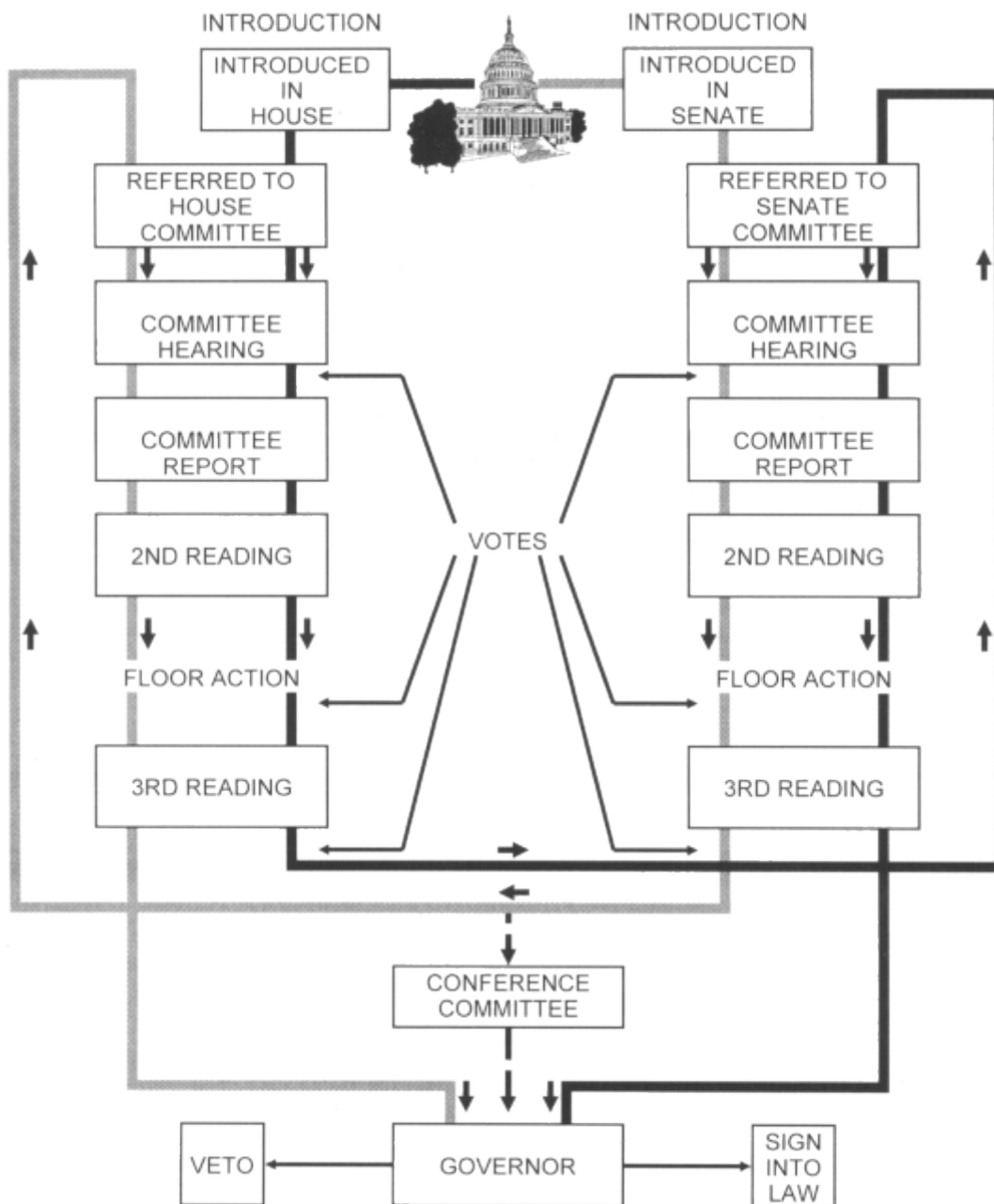
**Amendment Recommendation.** The governor may return a bill to the Legislature with suggested amendments. If the Legislature rejects the governor's suggestions, the governor may not return a bill with further amendments.

**Veto.** The Legislature may override a governor's veto if two-thirds of the members of each chamber vote in favor of doing so.

## VII. State Law

After a bill is signed by the governor or passed by the Legislature over the governor's veto, it is incorporated into the [Montana Code Annotated \(MCA\)](#). This is a compilation of all state laws. It is updated after each legislative session.

Source: Montana State Legislature Website, <https://leg.mt.gov>



# ADVOCACY 101

## INTRODUCTION

Once you or your organization has determined what policy areas to weigh in on, look for ways to advocate. You may advocate as a private citizen or as a representative of your organization. Either way, advocacy is simply finding opportunities to share your working knowledge of issues. You are the experts who are working to address these issues in your communities every day. Your policymakers want and need to hear from you about the status of these issues and your approach to solving them.

Advocacy may purely be educational without reference to particular legislation. There are no restrictions for individuals and organizations for this type of advocacy. Advocacy only becomes lobbying when you state a position on specific legislation. Lobbying does have restrictions:

- Federal or state employees can lobby as private citizens, but cannot do so during work hours.
- Organizations receiving state or federal funding can lobby as long as they do not use the public funding for the lobbying activities.
- Non-profits also have freedom to lobby as long as their spending remains below generous limits.

A surprising number of people believe that nonprofits cannot lobby. This is simply not true. Nonprofits are vehicles for democratic participation and have always had the right to lobby. In 1976, Congress affirmed this right by passing a law that gave nonprofits clear and broad latitude to lobby. When the legislation was passed, Sen. Robert Dole proclaimed, “Charities can be and should be important sources of information on legislative issues.”

## NON-LOBBYING ADVOCACY

The point of non-lobbying advocacy is to educate lawmakers on your work within Montana communities and to provide information on broad issues without mentioning specific legislation, i.e. *What needs are the families you serve facing? What programs are working well and important for those families?* Building relationships with elected officials outside of the session, as well as during the session, is vital for effective advocacy. If you are engaged year round in advocacy, then stakeholders will call on you for information on issues. Here are a few ideas for ways to advocate:

- **Collect & Share Client Stories.** One of the most impactful advocacy strategies is to collect client stories. Storytelling is an important strategy for persuading audiences across many different issues. The right story has great potential to change strongly held beliefs and make information easier to remember. For an example of story collections see: [https://mfbn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Final-Voices-of-Montana-\\_-COVID-19-Edition.pdf](https://mfbn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Final-Voices-of-Montana-_-COVID-19-Edition.pdf)
- **Host a site visit.** Invite a legislator to visit your organization, to meet your board, or to interact with volunteers and your clients. This may be done by contacting legislators and/or their staff through writing in the mail, email, or over the phone.
- **Meet with legislators.** Schedule meetings with legislators representing districts of your organization’s service area, and legislators that sit on committee(s) with jurisdiction over your policy issues to share updates on your program or an overview of your issues.
- **Testify as an expert.** If a committee invites you to provide technical knowledge on a subject, then you may do so and it’s not considered lobbying. By building relationships with legislators, they will recognize you as a reliable source of information and expert in the broader issue.



- **Through the media.** Publishing information about your organization and mission through social media and traditional media builds awareness of your cause. You may also present information on broader issues. Remember: if you don't ask for a position on specific legislation, then it is not lobbying.

**Timing.** To make sure your organization's mission and efforts are considered by legislators during the state session, consider timing your advocacy:

- **Any time!** Any time you get a chance to educate a lawmaker or the general public on your programs or the issues facing your communities, take that opportunity to advocate.
- **After elections,** meet with legislators before the session starts or early in the new session.
- **When discussion of policy issues** impacting your areas of concern come up in the legislature or media, take the time to advocate!

## Incorporating Those You Serve

Organizations play a significant role in elevating the voices of people who experience food insecurity and poverty in their daily lives, enabling them to speak on their own behalf about the issues that impact them. There are a variety of ways to go about this, but really what's most important is to build relationships and then invite people to be involved in the advocacy strategies your organization is already working on. Those who experience poverty and food insecurity first hand have the most accurate and personal understanding of how complex these issues are, and their voices must be at the table when devising policy and program solutions. Their stories and experiences illuminate the reality of these issues, and they can also become an active base to advocate for sustainable solutions. Here are some ideas for how to get your clients involved:

- **Host Focus Groups.** It is important to get to know your clients on a personal level and build relationships with them. Try reaching out by hosting focus groups and asking people about their experiences at your organization. What is working well? How can your programs and services be improved? What's missing? How can your clients help address these gaps? Oftentimes, just building a relationship is the first step to having a sustainable advocacy partner in the future.
- **Policy Education.** Invite some of your clients to come to your organization for a policy presentation. Many people might not understand the technical language written into a bill at the state legislature, but they will care if they learn they might be at risk of losing their SNAP. The more education you can provide your clients about upcoming or pending legislation that will affect them in the future, the more you will gain their trust and buy-in, and the more likely it is that they will want to advocate.
- **Action Alerts.** Assist your clients in signing up for Action Alerts from organizations like the Montana Food Bank Network or their local Food Bank, so they can be plugged into information on how and when to contact legislators about issues that pertain to them.
- **Letters, Phone Calls, Media.** Assist your clients with writing a letter to their legislator or publishing a letter to the editor, by providing them with templates and offering to help them write, edit, and submit it. Walking people through the process the first time will make them more confident when they do it on their own in the future.
- **Testify at the Legislature.** Invite your clients to testify on their own behalf at the legislative session, about the policies and programs that impact them the most. Provide assistance by helping them put their story together into a written testimony, and offer to practice with them (see section on collecting stories for more information on what content to include).

## LOBBYING

While advocacy is basically providing information and educating, lobbying is attempting to influence legislators to support or oppose a particular piece of legislation. Lobbying can seem intimidating but it is just a more focused form of advocacy and is easy. To lobby, you share your working knowledge of an issue, then simply add your opinion of legislation: why should the legislature oppose or support a bill? Lobbying can either be direct or grassroots. Direct lobbying is contacting your legislator regarding specific legislation. Grassroots lobbying would attempt to influence legislation by impacting the opinion of the general public. Here are few ideas on how to lobby:

- **Meet with legislators.** Present a case of why legislators should support your opinion on legislation. Tie in your experience to bolster your argument. Provide handouts with key facts, so legislators may review them at a later time.
- **Write or Call Legislators.** Besides meeting with legislators, you can write or call them to share your opinion. This option is helpful when key actions occur in the legislature.
- **Testify at Hearings.** A committee hearing is the occasion when anyone may publicly approve, oppose, or suggest changes to a bill. You may speak publicly or submit a written testimony when a bill of interest is considered.
- **Through the Media.** State your case for opposing or supporting bills being considered in the legislature through the press and social media. This includes penning press releases, op-eds, letters to the editor, and carrying out social media campaigns.

**Join allies.** Before embarking on lobbying, reach out to other nonprofits in your region and nationally that provide similar services and already advocate for your policy issues. You can ask to join existing coalitions or suggest establishing a partnership with organizations not currently advocating. Remember, the more voices you have involved, the stronger your message. Getting the public policy change you want occurs most readily when you partner with other groups.

**Sign-up for Action Alerts.** The easiest way to find lobbying opportunities is to sign-up for Action Alerts from organizations that already lobby. Advocacy groups in Montana share inside knowledge of upcoming bills or legislative actions, and how you can get involved.

You can sign up for Action Alerts from these organizations, to learn about upcoming policy priorities on various issues:

- [Montana Food Bank Network](#)
- [Montana Women Vote](#)
- [Montana Center for Independent Living](#)
- [Montana Wildlife Federation](#)
- [AARP](#)
- [Montana Budget and Policy Center](#)
- [Montana Human Rights Network](#)
- [ACLU](#)

***Are you ready to get started? See the Appendix for samples and ideas on how to get started with advocacy!***

# LOBBYING RESTRICTIONS

## NONPROFITS CAN LOBBY

Despite our common perception of a ‘lobbyist’, non-profits both small and large can lobby. For nonprofits, rules and regulations for lobbying are extremely generous, as long as nonprofits do not engage in ‘excessive lobbying’ or spend a certain percent of their budget on lobbying efforts. Lobbying can often be done at very little cost, and organizations can choose how their lobbying is regulated by the IRS: either through the 501(h) election or the insubstantial test.

## FEDERAL LAW

501©(3)’s (including houses of worship and public foundations), CAN lobby, as long as no federal funds are spent on lobbying and expenses for lobbying remain under a certain percentage of their overall budget. These spending ceilings are based on percentages of the nonprofit’s budget for the year, beginning at 20% of the first \$500,000. Here are the limits, if your organization decides to register through the [501\(h\) election](#).

Organization’s Annual Expenditures	Overall Lobbying Limit
\$500,000 or less	20%
\$500,000 to \$1 million	\$100,000 + 15% of excess over \$500,000
\$1 million to \$1.5 million	\$175,000 + 10% of excess over \$1 million
\$1.5 million to \$17 million	\$225,000 + 5% of excess over \$1.5 million
Over \$17 million	\$1,000,000

Example One: If your organization’s operating budget is \$500,000 annually, you cannot spend more than \$100,000 on lobbying in a fiscal year.

Example Two: If your organization’s operating budget is \$750,000 annually, you cannot spend more than \$137,500 on lobbying in a fiscal year.

- It is very difficult to exceed these financial boundaries unless lobbying is the majority of what your organization is doing!
- If your organization does not manually make the [501\(h\) election](#) to have their lobbying fiscally monitored by the substantial expenditure test, *then the insubstantial test will apply to your organization by default*. The insubstantial part test requires that “no substantial part of a charity’s activities be carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation”
  - Most tax experts advise that an organization can safely devote 3-5% of their activities to lobbying. It is easier to monitor lobbying with the 501(h) election.

## EXEMPT ACTIVITIES

Some activities are exempt, and are never considered lobbying:

- **Non-partisan Research/Analysis**
- **Membership Communication** (magazines, newsletters, conferences) is exempt unless it directly encourages members to lobby.
- **Examination of Broad Social Problems** doesn't count - even if it requires legislation.
- **Testimony, Technical Assistance** and other responses to requests for information from a legislative body.
- **Self Defense Activity** to help your organization survive - to fight attempts to end nonprofit status or fight harmful tax policies doesn't count.
- At the federal level, most contacts with the Executive Branch agencies and **work to influence regulations** doesn't count.

Source: *NW Harvest Advocacy Toolkit*, [https://www.philabundance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/AdvocacyToolkit\\_TOC\\_Final.pdf](https://www.philabundance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/AdvocacyToolkit_TOC_Final.pdf)

## AREAS OF CAUTION

**Elections.** Nonprofits should be careful when participating in political campaigns. 501 (c)(3)'s cannot endorse or contribute money to political candidates. Nonprofits can sponsor debates and conduct candidate surveys, as long as all candidates are included and no favoritism is shown to a particular candidate.

**On the Federal or State Dime.** In general, a person cannot engage in lobbying if his/her time is being paid by a federal or state grant. This means you cannot lobby legislators, attend legislative events, or analyze legislation while billing your time to a federal or state grant. There are some exceptions to this. If the grant specifically authorizes you to engage in certain activities (i.e. analyze legislation, develop materials to support public policy), then you may do so. Most of the time, however, time spent lobbying will need to be supported by unrestricted funds, donations, or other fundraising revenue.

## MONTANA LAW

State law is slightly different than federal law. There are no specific non-profit rules; however, at the state level, individuals paid more than \$2650 yearly (in 2021) for lobbying efforts must register with the state of Montana as a lobbyist. This typically applies if you're hiring someone to do lobbying for you, such as during the state session.

For more information on lobbying restrictions:

- Montana Commission on Political Practices, <https://politicalpractices.mt.gov/Home/Legislative-Session-and-Lobbying/>
- <https://bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BA-Fact-Sheet-c3-Compliance-Chart.pdf>  
[http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/wp-content/themes/acs/docs/resources/redesigned\\_tools/Difference\\_in\\_Lobbying\\_and\\_Advocacy.pdf](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/wp-content/themes/acs/docs/resources/redesigned_tools/Difference_in_Lobbying_and_Advocacy.pdf)

# DEVELOPING YOUR ADVOCACY STRATEGY

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before starting your advocacy work, it is important to consider what capacity you or your organization has to advocate, and what your priorities are. These initial brainstorming questions will help you begin to formulate a more comprehensive advocacy plan. *(Adapted from Northwest Harvest, Advocacy Toolkits, <https://www.northwestharvest.org/our-work/advocacy-public-policy/>)*

### I. KNOWLEDGE

**Do you, your organization, your volunteers, your peers, or others you are trying to engage understand the importance of advocating?** Do those involved understand the potential power of their own voice in advocacy? Do those involved understand the importance of policy change in the fight to end childhood hunger?

### II. CAPACITY

**What can you do?** What can you or your organization logistically do? How much time can you devote to advocating? Can you engage volunteers, clients, youth, friends, family, or others in your advocacy efforts? Start thinking about how you can work together to maximize impact.

### III. COMMITMENT

**What are you willing to do?** Will you publish your thoughts and opinions through the media? Are you willing to share articles and informational blurbs on social media? Will you talk to an elected official about your policy concerns? Will you educate your community on hunger-related issues? Will you assist others in speaking up, by helping them prepare a testimony or going with them to the legislature?

## SELECT YOUR PRIORITIES

Begin narrowing down your priorities and forming your advocacy strategy. Deciding how many issues you want to weigh in on may depend on the partners you are working with and the capacity of you and your partners to implement an advocacy strategy. Tackling a small number of strong, focused issues will have a much greater impact than addressing a long list of different issues. Stretching yourself too thin will dilute the effectiveness of your work! Ask yourself:

**I. What issues or programs do you have experience with and care about the most?** (Child hunger, affordable housing, access to health care, SNAP, etc.) Which of these issues or programs are likely to be discussed during the Montana State Legislative Session?

**II. Who will your partners be?** Who can you collaborate with to implement your advocacy strategy? What other individuals or organizations can you work with to address your policy priorities throughout the legislative session? Who will be directly impacted by the policy change and must have their voice heard?

## CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE

A strong overarching message will hold your entire advocacy strategy together. If you really want to influence decision-makers you should invest time in developing this message early in your advocacy planning. If your messages are numerous, vague, or too complex they might not grab the attention of your target audience or have real memorable impact. Your advocacy message should translate your organization's mission into your advocacy purpose, and it should show how the policy change you want to

make will address the root causes of your issue. Most effective advocacy messages have the following components:

- **PRIMARY MESSAGE:** usually the most universally compelling message for your target audience. It should include the following:
  - **Statement:** your central idea or the analysis/cause of the problem. It outlines why the change is important
  - **Evidence:** supports the statement with (easily understood) facts and figures, using tailored language
  - **Example:** adds a human face when communicating
  - **Goal:** highlights what you want to achieve
  - **Action desired:** the solution (or partial solution) to the problem. This forms the core of an advocacy message and distinguishes it from many other types of communication.
- **SECONDARY MESSAGE:** explains how the objectives of the primary message will be met. You can have several secondary messages. These may be tailored to wider, more specific audiences e.g. decision-makers, the media, professionals, or the general public.

## PLAN & ACT

### WHEN WILL YOU ADVOCATE?

How much time will it take to implement your desired advocacy strategies? What day will you set aside each week or each month to advocate? How many times per year will you write the media? Start planning exactly how often you or those you are working with will advocate.

### WHAT ADVOCACY STRATEGIES WILL YOU UTILIZE TO WORK TOWARDS YOUR GOAL?

Which strategies you choose to implement will depend on how many people you are collaborating with and how much time you can dedicate to advocating. This list shows how easy advocacy can be!

- **Do you have 30 seconds?**
  - Share an article or blog post on social media.
- **Do you have 1 minute?**
  - Enlighten your neighbor or coworker about your cause or target legislation.
- **Do you have 3 minutes?**
  - Call your elected official and talk to them about your issue, a need you are seeing in your community, or urge them to support or oppose your target legislation.
- **Do you have 10 minutes?**
  - Write an email to your elected official, explaining your organization, the work you do, the needs you see in your community, and why your legislator should care about these issues. If you are lobbying, you can also share your stance on a bill, why it's important, and give your "ask" to them. Then forward it to friends so they can use it as a template and do the same!
- **Do you have 30 minutes?**
  - Draft stories of your clients or your organization's work.
- **Do you have one hour?**
  - Write an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor on your cause to go in your local paper.
  - Invite your legislator to your organization for a tour and conversation about your work.
- **Do you have a few hours?**
  - Meet with clients of your organization and help them prepare testimony for the legislative session.

# ADVOCACY PLAN WORKSHEET

Adapted from: World Health Organization, Advocacy Strategy Template,  
<https://advocacyaccelerator.org/resource/advocacy-strategy-template/>

## BACKGROUND

- Provide brief context – What’s the problem? Why should you and others advocate on this issue?

## LONG-TERM GOAL

- What is your ultimate aim? What final goal are you fighting for, that this policy change will support (i.e. ending childhood hunger in the state of Montana)?

## SHORT-TERM GOAL(S)

- What specific bills are you following or working to either support or oppose in the 2019 legislature? Below, outline the bills and your desired outcomes. How will these support you in achieving your long-term goal?

## TARGETS

- Who has the power to make the change you want? Who is voting on relevant bills or making decisions relevant to your issue? Who influences those people?

## PARTNERS

- Who can you work with to reach your final goal? What other individuals, organizations, or unlikely allies will you partner with to build momentum around your issue?

## ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINE

- What will you do to share information and engage the public and policymakers on issues you are passionate about?
  - Are there other key stakeholders or partners you should engage?
  - How can you inform or engage the public of the issues you work on?
  - If you are lobbying, do you have networks (volunteers, email lists, partner organizations) or connections with those impacted by the bill that you can involve through education or testimony preparation?
  - Publish an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor about the cause, the needs you see in your community, or the impact of specific legislation?
  - Write letters, emails, or make phone calls to legislators?
  - Talk to your neighbor about the importance of a program or the challenges families in Montana are facing? Let them know if there is a particular piece of legislation they should know about?
  - Form a small coalition to meet with a legislator regarding the bill or issue?
  - If you are able to lobby, plan to call or email your legislator ahead of a bill hearing, or plan to testify at the hearing yourself?

## PRE-SESSION

List two activities you will do prior to the session to advocate for your cause, and the date by which you will complete them.

**Activity 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## DURING SESSION

List three activities you will do during the legislative session to advocate for your cause, and the date by which you will complete them (if you are going to testify, finalizing the date can be challenging because we often don't know when bill hearings are until the last minute!).

**Activity 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## POST SESSION

List one follow-up advocacy activity you will do, to ensure your issue remains a priority for your legislator.

**Activity 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## KEY MESSAGES

- What is your primary message, in one or two sentences? Why is this change important?
- What is a fast fact or figure that would be important to share with legislators?
- What is a true story or anecdote you can share with a legislator to support your data?
- What is your ultimate goal and the action that you want of your elected official or decision maker?

## BUDGET

- Will your advocacy or lobbying efforts cost you any money (i.e. travel, accommodations, etc.)? What is your budget?

# SOURCES & FURTHER RESOURCES

Thank you to the following organizations, from whom we borrowed and adapted content from for this toolkit:

- American Academy of Pediatrics, Advocacy & Policy Training Models, <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/Pages/Advocacy-and-Policy.aspx>
- [Source] American Academy of Pediatrics, Advocacy Guide, [https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/aap\\_advocacy\\_guide.pdf](https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/aap_advocacy_guide.pdf)
- [Source] American Public Health Association Health Reform Advocacy Toolkit, <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/AmericanPublicHealthAssocAdvocacyToolkit.pdf>
- Board Source, Advocacy for Nonprofit Boards, <https://boardsource.org/fundamental-topics-of-nonprofit-board-service/advocacy-ambassadorship/>
- [Source] Boulder Advocacy, Alliance for Justice, <https://bolderadvocacy.org/>
- Bread for the World, Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit, <http://www.bread.org/library/grassroots-advocacy-toolkit>
- [Source]: Bureau of Business and Economic Research, The Economic Impact of Medicaid Expansion in Montana, [https://mthcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/BBER-MT-Medicaid-Expansion-Report\\_4.11.18.pdf](https://mthcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/BBER-MT-Medicaid-Expansion-Report_4.11.18.pdf)
- California School Health Centers, Educating Policymakers, <http://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Leg-visit-guide.pdf>
- Center for Lobbying in Public Interest, Make a Difference For Your Cause in Three Hours a Week, <https://alliancems.org/wp-content/uploads/CLPI-MAKE-A-DIFFERENCE-3-hours-a-week.pdf>
- Center for Lobbying in Public Interest, Foundations for Civic Impact, <https://mcf.org/sites/default/files/files/pages/Forum%20-%20Foundations%20for%20Civic%20Impact%20-%20Private%20Foundations.pdf>
- [Source] Clean Air Carolina, Let's Advocate for Clean Air! Toolkit, <https://cleanaircarolina.org/advocacy/>
- [Source] Community Tool Box, Center for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>
- [Source] Congressional Hunger Center, Become an Anti-Hunger Advocate, <https://www.hungercenter.org/publications/become-an-anti-hunger-advocate/>
- [Source]: Economic Policy Institute, The Cost of Childcare in Montana, <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/MT>
- Independent Sector, Toolkits, <https://independentsector.org/policy/become-a-better-advocate/>
- [Source] International Society for Technology in Education, <https://cdn.iste.org/www-root/PDF/advocacy-pages/Edtech%20Policy%20One-Pager.pdf>
- [Source]: MIT Living Wage Calculator, Living Wage Calculation for Montana, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/30>
- Montana Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence, <https://www.mcadsv.com/>
- [Source] Montana State Legislature Website, <https://leg.mt.gov/>
- [Source] National Council of Nonprofits, Everyday Advocacy, <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy>
- National Council on Aging, Advocacy Toolkit, <https://www.ncoa.org/public-policy-action/advocacy-toolkit/>
- National Hemophilia Foundation, Advocacy Tools & Resources, <https://www.hemophilia.org/Advocacy-Healthcare-Coverage/Advocacy-Tools-Resources>
- [Source] Northwest Harvest, Advocacy Toolkits, <https://www.northwestharvest.org/advocacy>
- Philabundance, Advocacy Toolkit, [https://www.philabundance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/AdvocacyToolkit\\_TOC\\_Final.pdf](https://www.philabundance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/AdvocacyToolkit_TOC_Final.pdf)

- Stand for Your Mission, Advocacy Resources, <https://standforyourmission.org/resources/#advocacy-in-action>
- [Source] Sustainable Development Advocacy Toolkit, Stakeholder Forum and CIVICUS, European Union, [https://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit\\_FINAL.pdf](https://civicus.org/images/stories/SD2015%20Post-2015%20Advocacy%20Toolkit_FINAL.pdf)
- [Source] W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Advocacy Handbook, <https://wkkf.issuelab.org/resource/effective-advocacy-at-all-levels-of-government.html>
- Why Hunger, Rise Up: Organizing in Emergency Food Programs, <https://whyhunger.org/our-work/resources/rise-up-hunger-and-health/>

[Source]: World Health Organization, Advocacy Strategy Template, <https://advocacyaccelerator.org/resource/advocacy-strategy-template/>

# ADVOCACY BASICS WORKSHEETS

# FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR

Your organization's service area may be situated in one district, so only one Senator and one Representative directly represent your clients, or your service area may include multiple districts, which expands the list of Representatives and Senators to target. Your organization's voice best influences legislators elected to serve your clients' districts, because legislators keep their constituents' interests in mind when taking legislative action.

## TO FIND LEGISLATORS ONLINE:

1. Visit [leg.mt.gov](https://leg.mt.gov)
2. Click on "Find My Legislator" Button
3. Select link to how you would like to search for your legislators
  - a. By Address: Select "View a map" hyperlink, or visit this link directly:  
<https://leg.mt.gov/map/>
  - b. By Name: Select "Legislator Roster" hyperlink, or visit this link directly:  
<https://leg.mt.gov/legislator-information/>
  - c. By District: Select "Legislative District Map" hyperlink

# CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS

## CALLING LEGISLATORS

Regular office hours during the session are 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 8 a.m. to adjournment on Saturdays. Callers may leave messages for legislators or acquire general legislative information by calling the Information Desk at (406) 444-4800. Callers may leave messages for up to 5 individual legislators or 1 legislative committee per call.

## SENDING EMAILS & LETTERS

Legislators' email addresses can be found on their profile pages, see <https://leg.mt.gov/legislator-lookup>. To send a physical letter, address to:

Senator [Name]  
Montana Senate  
PO Box 200500  
Helena, MT 59620-0500

Rep. [Name]  
Montana House of Representatives  
PO Box 200400  
Helena, MT 59620-0400

## DURING THE INTERIM (OUT OF SESSION)

Outside of a legislative session, the legislative branch *does not* maintain staff or facilities through which constituents may contact their legislators. Instead, constituents may contact legislators directly through any of the means listed under the Address and Email (if provided) headings on their individual webpages. Individual webpages may be found by clicking on a legislator's name on the legislative roster: <https://leg.mt.gov/legislator-lookup/>.

## NOTE ON PUBLIC RECORD

Legislators are publicly elected officials. Communications with Legislators involving legislative business may be subject to the Right to Know provisions of Montana's Constitution and may be considered a "public record" pursuant to Montana law. As such, email sent or received, its sender and receiver, and the email's contents and attachments, may be subject to public disclosure, except as otherwise provided by Montana law.

# FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

Legislators want to hear from their constituents, even if it's educational background on your work. Members are more likely to weigh in on issues that their constituents feel strongly about, and there is no better way to display your passion for an issue than by taking the time to have a face-to-face meeting. Work with the Legislator to set up a meeting in Helena or the district. She/he have many duties, so plan for a meeting that is 15 minutes or less.

## SAMPLE MEETING REQUEST LETTER, OR EMAIL

*Senator [Name]  
Montana Senate  
PO Box 200500  
Helena, MT 59620-0500*

**OR**

*Rep. [Name]  
Montana House of Representatives  
PO Box 200400  
Helena, MT 59620*

*Dear [Title Last Name]:*

*I am [Title] of the [Organization Name] and hope to schedule a meeting with you in Helena or our district. We would love to share about our work in your district.*

*[Background of your organization]*

*I will be available to meet with you anytime on the [date(s)] in our district or anytime on [date(s)] in Helena. I would like to bring with me [list colleagues, or other activists if applicable], also from [your state/district]].*

*I can be reached at the phone number(s) below, and look forward to hearing from you soon.*

*Respectfully yours,*

*Name  
Institution (if appropriate)  
Address  
Phone Number*

# PREPARING FOR MEETINGS

A face-to-face meeting with a decision-maker and his or her staff can be a powerful opportunity to share information on your work and the challenges facing your community.

**PLAN YOUR MEETING.** Decide whether you are going alone or with a small group of people. The group may consist of individuals in your organization and/or other organizations with similar goals. If you go as a group, identify someone to lead the meeting and what each person is going to contribute to the discussion. This will help eliminate awkward silences or repetitive messages and will ensure that you hit all the key points you want to cover. Knowing ahead of time how much time you have will help you plan effectively.

**KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.** Do a little research about the decision-maker if you do not know much about her or him. Do research to find out what their experience is on your policy issue, if they have any, and how they view their role on the issue you're addressing.

**DEFINE YOUR MESSAGE AND TELL YOUR STORY.** Plan 2 or 3 points that get at the heart of your position, and share your personal experience or the experience of others in your group to illustrate your points. Touch both the mind and the heart of the decision-maker.

**STATE THE REASON FOR YOUR VISIT.** Be clear about why you are there, why they should be interested, and what you want them to do.

**INVITE COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS.** Engage in dialogue. This will make it easier to educate your decision-maker on your issues. Listen to what they have to say and invite their questions.

**ASK FOR A COMMITMENT.** If you don't ask for action, you won't see any.

- If you are simply **advocating** and not lobbying, ask for a general commitment on an issue area, but not a particular bill. For example, "Will you be an ally in fighting for food security?"
- If you are **lobbying**, ask for a direct stance on legislation. For example, "Will you vote yes on House Bill \_\_\_\_?" If they decline, encourage them to think about it and let them know you'll keep in touch.

**HAVE A LEAVE-BEHIND.** When applicable, provide a brief, 1-page piece of written information summarizing the information that you shared or providing further detail. Make yourself available for future conversations. Make sure your leave-behind includes your name and contact information on it or give them your business card.

**FOLLOW UP.** Send a thank-you note. Let them know that you appreciate their time. If you promised to get them additional information, attach it or let them know how and when they can expect to receive it.

# HOW TO DRAFT A LEAVE-BEHIND

A leave behind is often a one-page document that explains your policy issue. This allows the Legislator or staff to review your arguments or information on the topic at a later time. Having a well-polished message with background and data will help guide policy discussions. Here are tips in crafting one:

1. Keep the one-pager brief. For advocacy, the leave behind provides brief background on the issue and includes analysis backed up by facts and data. For lobbying, you can utilize the information to argue why your policy recommendation will help the policy question at hand.
2. Clearly state your policy recommendation(s) or message(s).
3. Begin with a brief overview of the policy issue and state the challenges you wish to address or the objectives you hope to achieve.
4. If needed, explain the history of the policy issue.
5. Use evidence, studies, facts and statistics.
6. Use bullet points instead of lengthy paragraphs.
7. You may conclude with a persuasive argument and summary statement: “Please protect SNAP...” or “Come and visit our food bank.”

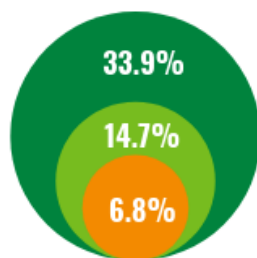


# LEAVE-BEHIND EXAMPLE

## Child Hunger in Montana

In Montana, 1 in 6 children live in homes that face food insecurity, or the inability to access food in a consistent manner, putting them at risk of hunger. Good nutrition, particularly in the early years of life, is important for establishing a solid foundation that has implications for a child's future physical and mental health, academic achievement and economic productivity. Hunger threatens this critical foundation, which in turn, threatens a child's opportunity to thrive.

### Montana Kids:



**Are At-Risk of Hunger**  
Live below 185% of poverty line

**Live in Poverty**  
Below the poverty line

**Live in Deep Poverty**  
Below 50% of poverty line



### Physical Growth, Mental Development & Overall Health

Poor or inconsistent nutrition negatively impacts a child's physical growth, mental development, and overall health status.



- Stress
- Infections and sickness
- Risk of chronic disease



- Access to affordable, healthy food
- Opportunity for physical activity

### Ability to Succeed in School

Food insecurity can impact cognitive development, ability for memory, language, motor skills and social interaction.



- Tardiness and absenteeism
- Grade repetition
- Social and behavioral challenges



- Math and reading scores
- Likelihood of high-school graduation
- Post-secondary education

### Economic Impact on Schools, Public Health & the Future Workforce

The economic impacts of child hunger extend far beyond the individual child and family, impacting our economies and communities.



- Cost to health care system
- Lost work time for parents, increasing risk of job loss



- Skills and education needed to secure economic self-sufficiency
- Earning potential

# SITE VISITS

Inviting officials to visit your organization is similar to requesting a face-to-face meeting, but site visits offer you the opportunity to show your work in action. You can organize an event with clients you work with and/or volunteers, so they may share first-hand stories of your work. Be prepared to answer questions about your organization's service in the community. Data of your impact or the needs of the community would also be helpful for the legislator to understand the context of your work.

## EXAMPLE SET UP FOR A TOUR

It is important to structure the visit. Don't plan a big presentation or focus a lot of time on talking. Instead, give a brief introduction and then give visitors an opportunity to ask questions throughout the visit.

### At the start (before the tour):

- Introduce all participants.
- Present supporting materials you have prepared.
- Give a brief overview of the background of your organization, who works there, clients you serve, and services you provide.

### During the tour:

- As you tour your organization, showcase typical activities, describe successes, and share about your work.
- Consider telling one or two brief "success stories." You might want to arrange for a client or volunteer to be present for questions.
- You can have the legislator carry out a typical activity at your organization, such as packing boxes at a pantry.

### Wrapping up:

- Allow for time after the tour to sit down with the legislator and answer any questions.
- Thank all participants for taking the time to visit.

*Adapted from: <http://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Leg-visit-guide.pdf>*

## SAMPLE INVITATION

To invite the legislator to your organization, send an official letter by mail and email, then follow up a week or two later to verify the legislator is available. Opportune times for visits are when legislators visit their district, or when the Legislature is out of session.

*[Date]*

*Senator [Name]  
Montana Senate  
PO Box 200500  
Helena, MT 59620-0500*

**OR**

Rep. [Name]  
Montana House of Representatives  
PO Box 200400  
Helena, MT 59620-040

Dear [Representative Doe or Senator Doe]

*I am writing to invite you to visit [Organization Name]. This will be an excellent opportunity for you to hear from your constituents about the valuable services supporting our neighbors in our community. We are hoping to have you visit [time frame or date options] but please let me know what works well for you.*

*At this meeting, you will have the chance to tour our organization and learn more about our work. You will also have the chance to visit with clients who will share their personal experiences.*

*I will follow up with a call to your office next week to learn of your availability. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.*

Sincerely,

[Name]  
[Title]  
[Organization]  
[Contact Information]

# COLLECTING STORIES

One of the most impactful advocacy strategies is to collect and share client stories. Storytelling is an important strategy for persuading audiences across many different issues. The right story has great potential to change strongly held beliefs and make information easier to remember. For an example of story collections see: <https://mfbn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Voices-of-Montana-2017.pdf>.

Here are possible questions to ask clients in an interview:

## 1. Demographic Questions

- a. What is your name?
- b. How old are you?
- c. Where are you from?
- d. How long have you lived in the area?
- e. What is your household like? How many people live with you?
- f. Do you participate in SNAP?
  - i. If yes, what has your experience been like with the program?
  - ii. If no, why not?

## 2. Food Bank/ Agency Related Questions

- a. How long have you been coming to (agency name)?
- b. Tell me about what caused you to come to (agency name) in the first place.
- c. How have things changed for you? What are the reasons you came today?
- d. Tell me about your experience with the food bank. What the volunteers and employees like? What kind of food do you get here? What would you change if you could?
- e. What would your situation be like if you didn't have a place like this to help you?

## 3. Future Plans

- a. What are your hopes or plans for the future?
- b. Has your experience with (agency name) helped you to achieve some goals you've had?
- c. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me that we haven't talked about already?

Before you record any client stories, make sure to get written permission, and especially clarify how much personally identifying information participants want to share, i.e. first name only and city of residence. Respecting your clients' privacy and preferences is the most important thing! Some of them may not feel comfortable sharing their story, and it's important to only work with those who are eager to share their experiences publicly.

# COLLECTING STORIES, CONT.

## EXAMPLE RELEASE FORM FOR MEDIA RECORDING

I, the undersigned, do hereby consent and agree that the [Organization], its employees, or agents have the right to take photographs, videotape, or digital recording of me on \_\_\_\_\_ to use these in any and all media, now or hereafter known, and exclusively for the purpose of the [Organization]. I further consent that:

I give permission for [Organization] to use the following herein the recording or by descriptive text or commentary (Please check all that apply):

☐ My first name

☐ My location (town/city and state)

☐ My photo or video recording that shows my face

OR

☐ My story/quotes only (do not use my name or location or picture)

I do hereby release to the [Organization], its agents, and employees all rights to exhibit this work in print and electronic form publicly or privately and to market and sell copies. I waive any rights, claims, or interest I may have to control the use of my identity or likeness in whatever media used.

I understand that there will be no financial or other remuneration for recording me, either for initial or subsequent transmission or playback.

I also understand that the Montana Food Bank Network is not responsible for any expense or liability incurred as a result of my participation in this recording, including medical expenses due to any sickness or injury incurred as a result.

I represent that I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understand the foregoing statement, and am competent to execute this agreement.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# OPINION EDITORIALS (Op-eds)

One of the best ways to gain visibility for your organization and the issues you care about is to submit a timely, persuasive op-ed to a local newspaper. Because Senators and Representatives pay close attention to what is happening in their districts, local media coverage can be quite effective in getting your message to them as well. Below is a list of tips to help you develop an effective op-ed piece.

## WRITING YOUR OP-ED

- **Argue for your organization's work.** Tell the community and stakeholders why your organization's work is important. An op-ed is a perfect way to argue for the issues your work addresses.
- **Make only one point well.** Remember to focus on only one issue or idea — in the first paragraph. Start with your strongest argument.
- **Base it on facts.** Express your opinion, then base it on factual, researched, or first-hand information.
- **Candid and personable.** Editors want to publish op-eds that are interesting to readers, so be candid and personable. Use conversational language and avoid jargon.
- **Keep it brief.** An op-ed should never be longer than 750 words. Each newspaper has their own word limits, so check first.
- **Use short, easy to follow sentences.**

## MAKE IT RELEVANT

- **Timing is everything,** so jump at the right opportunities. Link your op-ed to an event or story that is dominating the news.
- **Tell a local story.** Make sure your op-ed relates broad issues to what's happening in your community. Op-eds are meant to stimulate public discussion and drive public debate.
- **Use your op-ed to build your relationships** with your Senators or Representatives. If they have been supportive of the issue, thank them for their leadership in the op-ed and forward a copy of the published op-ed to their office.

## PRACTICAL TIPS

- Contact your newspaper to find out the word limit, preferred method of submission, and name and phone number of an editorial contact to ensure your submission arrived. Ask the opinion page editor for suggestions on what their paper seeks in an op-ed contribution.
- Submit your op-ed with a brief bio, along with a quick overview of your organization, and your phone number, email address, and mailing address. Include a note to briefly introduce your credentials and explain why the issue is important to their readers. You may also be asked for a head shot to run with the article.
- When using email, avoid sending attachments that may set off spam filters. Instead send your op-ed in the body of the email.
- Thank the outlet if your piece is run. If the piece is not run, try to obtain comments that you can use when producing future op-ed pieces. You can also submit it to other newspapers.

*Adapted from: APHA Health Reform Advocacy Toolkit,  
<https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/americanpublichealthassocadvocacytoolkit.pdf>; Let's Advocate for Clean Air! Toolkit, <https://cleanaircarolina.org/advocacy/>.*

## ADVOCACY OP-ED EXAMPLE:

### ***SNAP is a Vital Resource for Foster Care Youth***

*Montana is facing a crisis in our social welfare system. The number of children in foster care continues to rise, while the state budget has decreased, resulting in a loss of state workers and offices. Because a shortage in available foster homes has also persisted each year, we must prepare for more foster youth exiting or “aging out” of the foster care system at age 18 without having a family to rely on. Without a support network, foster youth face a harsh reality, including food insecurity. Continued access to assistance programs like the Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) is vital.*

*Our Youth Development department with the Human Resource Development Council in Bozeman witnesses the strengths and struggles of former foster care youth working to get ahead. Society expects these youth to survive on their own with limited state and federal support. Most American youth are not able to fully support themselves financially at age 18, or even by age 21. Yet, foster youth must become financially independent immediately after aging out, often without support from a stable family, which puts them at risk for hunger and homelessness. Programs such as SNAP are important in providing food stability for our foster youth as they transition to adulthood.*

*SNAP currently supports many of the foster youth we work with and has proven to impede the risk of hunger as a youth turns 18. Under current law, able-bodied individuals between age 18 and 49 who do not have dependent children are restricted to only 3 months of SNAP assistance in a 3-year period unless they work at least 20 hours a week. Many of our foster youth aging out of the system encounter this restrictive time limit. As it is, three months can be too little time for foster youth aging out to find a job.*

*Foster care youth are a disproportionately vulnerable population, often facing poverty, unemployment and food insecurity upon leaving the system. In fiscal year 2011, only 22 percent of foster youth were employed at age 17 – one year before they were expected to fully provide for themselves. Unfortunately, their employment rate failed to even reach 50 percent by age 19 or by age 21.*

*Their experiences with homelessness also remained consistently high in the years following care. Within a year of aging out, over 40 percent had experienced homelessness. Actually, Montana’s rate of foster youth who had experienced homelessness by age 19 is tied for second highest in the nation and double the national average. SNAP is a vital resource, ensuring former foster youth have access to nutritious foods during these periods of economic hardship.*

*Every day at HRDC, we witness the determination of emerging adults to not only survive but to also thrive despite not having the freedoms and opportunities of most American youth. Children do not choose to be in foster care, nor to age out without family support; therefore, supporting this vulnerable population is crucial.*

*We ask our community to be aware of our foster youth population. Sixty-three youth aged out of care in 2017, and so far, this year 50 youth have aged out of care. That’s 113 youth who currently face the realities of functioning independently. Our society expects each one to support their nutritional and food access on their own, while also maneuvering housing procurement, their social-emotional needs, transportation, and finding a job. More can be done in our society to support our foster youth, but SNAP, as it stands today, provides foster youth access to food and makes sure their nutritional needs are met.*

[https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/opinions/guest\\_columnists/snap-a-vital-resource-for-our-foster-care-youth/article\\_6a3905a9-6669-5ab2-b633-696b79b6f673.html](https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/opinions/guest_columnists/snap-a-vital-resource-for-our-foster-care-youth/article_6a3905a9-6669-5ab2-b633-696b79b6f673.html)

# LETTERS TO THE EDITORS (LTEs)

The letter-to-the-editor page is among the most closely read parts of newspaper. Policy-makers look at letters to gauge public opinion. Letters to the editor are exactly that: letters written to the editor of a newspaper with the objective of being published on the editorial page. You can use your letter to the editor to clarify a point, highlight the importance of an issue, or simply react to a recent situation or occurrence that received media coverage.

- **RESPOND TO TOPICS OF INTEREST.** Find ways to connect your issue to other stories in the news.
- **KEEP YOUR LETTER SHORT.** Letters to the editor should be brief and to the point. Aim for 250 words or less. Be sure to check with your local paper to find out about their guidelines for submitting letters because many of them have restrictions on length.
- **TELL YOUR STORY.** Your letter should include a personal story or experience that illustrates why readers should care about the issue. Be sure your letter incorporates your message in an easily understandable format.

*Adapted from: American Academy of Pediatrics Advocacy Guide, <http://www.mdaap.org/AdvocacyGuide.pdf>*

## ADVOCACY LTE EXAMPLE:

### ***Help stave off childhood hunger in Montana***

*Childhood hunger is an issue throughout our state as over 42,000 children in Montana face food insecurity.*

*What is food insecurity? Food insecurity is the inability to access food in a consistent manner, resulting in reduced quality or variety of diet. Food banks and federal nutrition programs have made severe hunger and malnutrition not as prevalent in our country, but there are thousands of Montanans who still face food insecurity.*

*Our most prized and vulnerable population is our children. In Billings, 275-285 students receive Back Pack Meals assistance each week, and an average of 150 middle- and high-school students access the teen pantries located within our schools. Research shows and teachers will share, students who come to school hungry or worried about their next meal are not able to focus in school and succeed. Children in our community are our next employees, business owners and leaders.*

*As a Billings high-school student and participant in the Governor and First Lady Leadership Council, I encourage you to learn more about childhood hunger in our community and state. Please take the time to become educated on this issue and find ways to assist in combating childhood hunger in our community. More information can be found on the websites for Montana No Kid Hungry and Fight Childhood Hunger Week.*

*Jon Hertz*

*Billings*

[https://billingsgazette.com/opinion/letters/help-stave-off-childhood-hunger-in-montana/article\\_65da55cf-9c3d-549f-8149-1c0218af6867.html](https://billingsgazette.com/opinion/letters/help-stave-off-childhood-hunger-in-montana/article_65da55cf-9c3d-549f-8149-1c0218af6867.html)



# SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media sites — like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube — present great opportunities to raise awareness of your organization, the work you do, and the issues you care about. The perception is that social media reaches young people primarily, but its growth is explosive and far-reaching. People of all ages around the world are increasingly using social media.

Literally hundreds of social media applications exist that could be used for digital advocacy, but to get started, spend your time and resources where your supporters are most likely to be (**Facebook and Twitter** are good bets).

## ENGAGE, INFORM, AND RECRUIT

- Remember, social media is only effective when you are interacting with your audience. That means you'll need to commit to posting new stories, connecting with new people, answering questions, and being engaged as often as possible — daily is ideal.
- Share content that encourages your supporters to act. Post inspirational stories, compelling photos, or ask an open question. Unlike traditional media, social media allows you to develop stronger relationships with your supporters.
- Keep supporters informed about your work and recruit new supporters by posting about your accomplishments, announcements, volunteer opportunities, and events.
- Start small, but strong. It's far better to focus on one form of social media — and do it well — than to host multiple sites that are ghost towns.

## CREATIVE IDEAS

- Share images of volunteers or events
- Provide supporters with a place to share their own stories. Ask supporters to submit photos, stories, and other content for your social media pages.
- Ask open-ended questions in your posts that will draw supporters into sharing their opinions and perspectives. (Monitor your posts for inappropriate comments and respond as necessary.)
- At your events, use a smartphone to record 15 second videos of your volunteers in action. Then, tweet them or post them to Facebook or your website.
- Give supporters a behind-the-scenes glimpse of your organization or a sneak preview of your projects. Introduce the people on your team that help make things happen.
- Post quotes from enthusiastic supporters or families you've helped about what your organization means to them, or why they decided to get involved in your cause.

## 3 EASY TIPS

- Every time you post a photo, make sure to tag the people, including lawmakers, in it.
- Foster connections with supporters by responding to every question or comment that is posted.
- Have fun. Social media is an opportunity to connect with a community of people who appreciate what your organization does. Enjoy it.

**Social media is also a great tool in lobbying.** It's a means to urge your network to contact lawmakers ahead of key votes. For more information on how to lobby, see the lobbying section of this toolkit.

*Adapted from: Community Tool Box, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/electronic-advocacy/main>*

# FACEBOOK EXAMPLES

**Montana No Kid Hungry**  
Published by Janyssa Martini [?] · 10 December at 10:18 · 🌐

We're so happy to see Stevensville, Montana kids getting a good breakfast at school each day! Staff at Stevensville Primary are innovation leaders in Montana because they are transforming school into a place that cares for the whole child, ensuring that fundamental needs are met before focusing on academics. Not to mention their dedication to serving as much healthy, homemade food as possible! Read the article below to get the full story, and share with anyone you know who would like to see Breakfast After the Bell come to their school.

No Kid Hungry Ravalli Republic KPVJ Superintendent Elsie Arntzen Montana School Nutrition Association Montana School Boards Association



RAVALLIREPUBLIC.COM

**Stevensville School District expands breakfast program**  
Stevensville School District is now serving breakfast to students in the...


**Montana No Kid Hungry**  
Published by Janyssa Martini [?] · 14 August · 🌐

Sure, summer meal sites provide kids with nutritious food. But they do so much more than that! If you're in an end-of-summer slump, get off that couch and text "FOOD" to 877-877 to find a summer meal site near you 🌻🌱📶

#nokidhungry #summermeals

"WE'RE DOING FUN THINGS, ACTIVE THINGS, AT OUR SUMMER MEAL SITE. WE'RE GETTING KIDS OFF OF THEIR SCREENS AND AWAY FROM THE DIGITAL WORLD. IT'S A GREAT SOCIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THEM."

KARLA, MEAL SITE STAFF MEMBER, PLENTYWOOD MT



**Montana Food Bank Network**  
September 20 at 2:33 PM · 🌐

Could your family of four live on just over \$2,000 a month to cover rent, food, clothes & transportation?

Over 1 in 8 Montana families with kids live in poverty. We can do better than that!

#Beanadvocate, stay informed, learn more and get involved with poverty and fighting food insecurity stigmas in our state.

Under age 6, Deep Poverty	10.1	8.5	8.1
<b>Seniors</b>			
Age 60 and over	8.8	8.9	7.9
Age 65 and over	7.6	8.9	7.2
<b>Families</b>			
Poverty	9.3	8.0	7.7
w/children	16.2	13.1	13.4
<b>Single Mothers w/ children</b>			
Poverty	45.3	37.4	34.6
w/children under age 5	64.5	39.7	37.4
<b>People with Disabilities</b>			
Poverty	21.3	20.3	17.3

MFBN.ORG

**2017 Poverty Data Now Available - Montana Food Bank Network**

## TWITTER EXAMPLES

 **No Kid Hungry** @nokidhungry · Sep 30

There's still time to dine out and do good to help the 1 in 6 kids struggling with hunger! Make a difference one meal at a time - find one of 15,000 participating restaurants near you [bit.ly/2N71Xla](https://bit.ly/2N71Xla) #HungerCantWait



563 views 0:10 / 0:36

26 33

 **Feeding America** @FeedingAmerica · Sep 26

More than 12 million hungry kids in the U.S. may not know where they will get their next meal. No child should be forced to skip meals. Get involved, make a difference and #PassThePlate during #HungerActionMonth: [bit.ly/2vnzNAL](https://bit.ly/2vnzNAL)



1 27 32

# LOBBYING ACTIVITIES WORKSHEETS

# LOBBYING: TRACK & TARGET POLICY

**Tracking Policy.** To know the political landscape, remain vigilant of bills introduced in the legislature. Here's how to track bills in the Montana State Legislature:

**Monitoring Bills.** The Montana Legislative Services website provides all information on bills, including the bill's text, who has sponsored it, what committee it's in, and the legislative actions taken so far. To find a bill:

1. Go to Montana Legislative Services website, <http://leg.mt.gov/>
2. Click on "Find a Bill" button
3. Now, you are on webpage "Montana Legislature: Look Up Bill Information"
  - a. On the top right corner you can select the State Sessions, so be sure it is set for the current session.
  - b. Enter bill number or search by keyword, committee or sponsor
4. Also, toward the bottom of the page, you can create a "**Preference Account**" that will allow you to track specific bills and notify you when any actions have been taken regarding the bill.

**Watching Hearings.** If you would like to watch live hearings and review past hearings:

1. Go to Montana Legislative Services website, <http://leg.mt.gov/>
2. Scroll down and click on "Looking for Archived Recordings"
3. On the left-hand side of the page, you can navigate to upcoming hearings and past recordings
  - a. "Now Playing" shows upcoming hearing recordings by date.
  - b. "New Recordings" shows the most recent hearing recordings.
  - c. If you know the date of the past recording you would like to view, the Calendar tab allows you to select the date.

## Lobbying Targets.

The two types of legislators to focus your advocacy activates are those that:

- a) Represent the districts of the organization's service area, and
- b) Sit on committee(s) with jurisdiction over your policy issues. Note: the Committees with jurisdiction over social welfare issues are typically the House Human Services Committee and the Senate Committee on Public Health, Welfare and Safety.

**Profiling Legislators.** An effective lobbying message caters to each legislator. Building relationships with legislators involves knowing their background, policies they champion, and issues important to their district. Time with legislators is limited, so a profile shows you which aspects to emphasize, and which points to spend less time on. A worksheet on profiling legislators can be found on page 58.



# LOBBYING: TESTIFY BEFORE A COMMITTEE

One of the most important opportunities to become involved in the debate over a bill is when it is the subject of a hearing before a legislative committee. You can testify on any bill that concerns you. People who wish to testify will take turns speaking at a podium in front of the committee.

- Begin your testimony with “Mr. Chairman/Madam Chairperson, members of the committee, my name is (first and last name) (spell name) and I urge you to...”
- Establish what expertise you have or why you care about the issue (*title/position and organization*).
- Provide evidence of your stance. What needs are you seeing in your community? Brief personal/client stories are impactful.
- You only have 2-3 minutes – practice and time yourself!
- End by clearly stating what action you want the committee to take: “Vote YES/NO on...”
- When all testimony is over, the chair will allow the committee to ask questions of those who testified.

Those testifying before a committee should also adhere to the following public comment guidelines established by the Legislature:

## LEGISLATURE’S OFFICIAL PUBLIC COMMENT GUIDELINES

<https://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2015-2016/Public-Comment-Guidelines.pdf>

### Public Comment as Part of the Public Record

Public comment submitted to a legislative committee is part of the public record.

- All committee hearings at the Capitol are broadcast live over the Internet, and many are broadcast on statewide TV, as well. Meetings are also recorded. These recordings are posted on the committee’s website and are available to everyone as part of the permanent, public record. Any personal information you share will be part of that record.
- Written documents are also public documents. If you plan to submit written material, please remove any information that you wish to keep private, such as health conditions, names, addresses, phone numbers, or Social Security numbers.

### Presenting Your Public Comment

During the public comment period, please follow these guidelines to ensure that all members of the public have an opportunity to speak and that committee members receive information they can use to make policy decisions and recommendations.

- DO introduce yourself at the podium and spell your last name. Legislative rules require that you provide your name if you are providing public testimony. (S30-60/H30-40)
- DO explain to the committee what policy change you believe the committee should explore and recommend to the Legislature.
  - If you have a personal experience to illustrate your case, please summarize it briefly.
- DO limit your remarks to the subject of the agenda item and try to avoid repeating what others have said.
- DO be brief.
- DO bring handouts if you feel an issue needs to be explained in depth.
  - Provide copies for the committee members and staff. Because the committees vary in size, research the number of members ahead of time and add several other copies for staff.
  - Include your name and contact information so committee members can contact you.

- DO maintain decorum. It is not appropriate to clap, cheer, or boo about comments made by other speakers.
- DO NOT ask the committee to intervene in a case involving a specific individual.
  - The committee cannot intervene in a situation that may be the subject of a departmental hearing or action or court proceeding.
  - This committee CAN recommend changes to various laws. Be specific about the policies or laws you would like to have changed and state the reasons why you believe the changes are necessary.
- DO NOT ask the committee members questions.
  - This is the committee's chance to hear from you and to ask you questions.

### EXAMPLE TESTIMONY:

*"Mr. Chairman/woman, Members of the Committee, my name is \_\_\_\_ (spell), and I am the [Position Title] at [Organization's name]. [One sentence of what the organization does]. We work to end hunger in Montana – a challenge that cannot be met without strong public food programs, the most important of which is SNAP. So, I urge you to support/oppose [bill name/number].*

*As you will hear from the opponents of this bill, SNAP is working in Montana and its working well – reducing hunger, improving nutrition, and supporting our local economy. SNAP is currently helping 120,000 Montanans keep food on the table while bringing federal dollars back to our state to be spent at grocery stores and farmers markets.*

*Our state agency estimates that the restrictions included in HB361 would impact 15,000 individuals – that is 1 in 8 of the Montanans currently participating in SNAP. This cut would have severe implications on hunger in Montana, as well as on our local economy, reducing SNAP dollars by \$20 million per year.*

*Under our current standards, qualifying for SNAP benefits is not easy. Montana has a gross income threshold set at 200% of the federal poverty line. However, meeting this gross limit in no way guarantees that a family will qualify for SNAP. This is because everyone who applies also has to meet the net income threshold of just 100% of the federal poverty line (just over \$2000/mo., family of 4).*

*Lowering the gross income threshold from 200% of poverty to 130% of poverty, as this bill proposes, will primarily impact working families with children – working families with incomes that are over 130% of poverty but because of the cost of living, they are still able to meet the stringent net guidelines. Under the change proposed in HB361, a family of four making just \$2700 per month would no longer be able to qualify for SNAP, regardless of how much they are paying for childcare, rent, and utilities.*

*Secondly, the provision of this bill requiring a resource limit would be counterproductive and costly. Research clearly demonstrates that building and maintaining assets such as owning a reliable vehicle (needed to get to work, to the grocery store) and having some money set aside for emergencies – is crucial to achieving financial stability and avoiding even greater financial crisis.*

*Resource limits also increase the risk of program error and raise administrative costs because of the increased time needed to document assets and because they increase the prevalence of program churn – the costly process by which clients fall off the program at recertification due to added paperwork requirements, then have to reapply.*

*House Bill 361 would restrict a program that is already effective and efficient. By limiting access to SNAP, the need for food assistance will be further shifted onto the backs of emergency food providers. This is a burden our network cannot take on. Instead, we will see increased hunger in Montana, fewer federal dollars coming into our local economies, and increased cost to our state. We strongly urge you to oppose this bill."*

# LOBBYING: BY PHONE, EMAIL & LETTER

Communication with legislators can occur anytime by phone, letter and email. Keeping in contact during critical times in the legislative process will remind legislators of your arguments for or against legislation. This mode of contact is a way to keep members updated on issues, and let them know how they can get involved in championing your causes.

**Calling.** Take less than 30 seconds to convey your position, so be prepared to condense your message.

**Letters/Emails.** Still be brief, but you can provide a fuller argument on your position for an issue.

- For emails: Place the Bill Number or Title in the subject line.

## Ideas on Crafting your Message:

- **Be brief.** Legislators have many demands on their time. They appreciate letters/calls that are short and to the point.
- **Address your letter to a specific legislator or legislators.** Depending on your message, you may want to write to the sponsor of a bill, certain members of a committee, or your own legislators. Don't address your letter to the entire Legislature.
- If your letter is about a specific bill, **identify bills by their number, title, and sponsor.**
- **Tips on Messaging:**
  - **Put the message in your own words.** Form letters and petitions don't have the same impact as personal, informed opinions.
  - **Include your name, address, and a little about who you are.** What are your credentials? Are you personally affected? Do you work with people who will be affected? Are you an expert?
  - **Explain your position on the bill.**
    - Why do you personally care about the bill?
    - Include one or two arguments they should consider.
    - Give any sources of information that you use to make your point.
  - **Ask for the legislator's support or opposition** - clearly state what you want the Legislator to do, e.g. *"I urge you to vote yes on SB123 to support Hunters against Hunger"*

*Adapted from: Montana State Legislature Website, <https://leg.mt.gov/legislator-lookup/contacting-legislators/>*

## Example Message – 2017 State Session, House Bill 361:

My name is *[first and last name]*, I'm *[calling/writing]* from *[town]*. I am *[add something about who you are and why you care - do you represent an organization that serves SNAP families, are you a SNAP recipient, a concerned Montanan, a teacher, a business owner, a dietician, etc.]* I urge you to oppose House Bill 361, restricting SNAP eligibility.

SNAP income guidelines effectively target the program to those who need it most. Further restricting the limits will push families off of the program, worsening hunger in our state. In addition, the proposed resource limit would hurt families and seniors with modest resources. Having savings or other resources is critical for families trying to get back on their feet. Please oppose these cuts to SNAP by voting against HB 361.



# LOBBYING: LETTERS TO THE EDITORS (LTEs)

The letter-to-the-editor page is among the most closely read parts of newspaper. Policy-makers look at letters to gauge public opinion. Letters to the editor are exactly that: letters written to the editor of a newspaper with the objective of being published on the editorial page. You can use your letter to the editor to clarify a point, highlight the importance of an issue, or simply react to a recent situation or occurrence that received media coverage.

- **RESPOND TO TOPICS OF INTEREST.** Find ways to connect your issue to other stories in the news.
- **KEEP YOUR LETTER SHORT.** Letters to the editor should be brief and to the point. Aim for 250 words or less. Be sure to check with your local paper to find out about their guidelines for submitting letters because many of them have restrictions on length.
- **TELL YOUR STORY.** Your letter should include a personal story or experience that illustrates why readers should care about the issue. Be sure your letter incorporates your message in an easily understandable format.
- **INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP.** An LTE can be signed by an individual or a group.

*Adapted from: American Academy of Pediatrics Advocacy Guide, <http://www.mdaap.org/AdvocacyGuide.pdf>*

## LOBBYING EXAMPLE:

*As the Montana Association of Christians, we advocate for a more compassionate and just world that recognizes the inherent dignity of each person, regardless of economic status. Jesus both models feeding the hungry and teaches that when we feed or quench the thirst "of the least of these," we are blessing God (Matthew 14:13-21 & Matthew 25:31-46). On behalf of our neighbors grappling with hunger and economic insecurity, we write this letter to express our support for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).*

*We are disheartened that Congress is currently divided on this important program. The House passed a version of the farm bill that would cut SNAP and leave more Montanans hungry, while the Senate passed a bill that protects and strengthens the program. More than 71 percent of SNAP recipients in Montana are in families with children. We know that SNAP helps to ensure that these children have enough to eat and sets them up for lifelong success, keeping them healthy and able to succeed in school. In addition, almost 29 percent of SNAP participants are in families with seniors or people with disabilities, helping them to live with independence and dignity.*

*The bipartisan Senate farm bill is the right way forward. We urge U.S. Rep. Greg Gianforte, U.S. Sen. Steve Daines and U.S. Sen. Jon Tester to work with their colleagues to pass a final farm bill that protects SNAP.*

*Rev. Valerie Webster, Bozeman, Episcopal Church,  
Rev. George Goodrich, Bozeman, Presbyterian Church USA,  
Rev. Dr. Marc Stewart, Billings, United Church of Christ,  
Bishop Jessica Crist, Great Falls, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,  
Jan Martin, Helena, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,  
Wendy Campbell, Darby, Christian Church, Disciples of Christ*

# LOBBYING: OPINION EDITORIALS (Op-eds)

One of the best ways to gain visibility for your organization and the issues you care about is to submit a timely, persuasive op-ed to a local newspaper. Because Senators and Representatives pay close attention to what is happening in their districts, local media coverage can be quite effective in getting your message to them as well. Below is a list of tips to help you develop an effective op-ed piece.

## WRITING YOUR OP-ED

- Make only one point well. Remember to focus on only one issue or idea — in the first paragraph. Start with your strongest argument.
- Have a clear viewpoint. Come down hard on one side of the issue.
- Express your opinion, then base it on factual, researched, or first-hand information.
- Editors want to publish op-eds that are interesting to readers, so be candid and personable. Use conversational language and avoid jargon.
- Keep it brief. An op-ed should never be longer than 750 words. Each newspaper has their own word limits, so check first.
- Use short sentences.

## MAKE IT RELEVANT

- Timing is everything, so jump at the right opportunities. Link your op-ed to an event or story that is dominating the news.
- Tell a local story. Make sure your op-ed relates broad issues to what's happening in your community. Op-eds are meant to stimulate public discussion and drive public debate.
- Use your op-ed to build your relationship with your Senators or Representatives. If they have been supportive of the issue, thank them for their leadership in the op-ed and forward a copy of the published op-ed to their office.

## PRACTICAL TIPS

- Contact your newspaper to find out the word limit, preferred method of submission, and name and phone number of an editorial contact to ensure your submission arrived. Ask the opinion page editor for suggestions on what their paper seeks in an op-ed contribution.
- Submit your op-ed with a brief bio, along with a quick overview of your organization, and your phone number, email address, and mailing address. Include a note to briefly introduce your credentials and explain why the issue is important to their readers.
- When using email, avoid sending attachments that may set off spam filters. Instead send your op-ed in the body of the email.
- Thank the outlet if your piece is run. If the piece is not run, try to obtain comments that you can use when producing future op-ed pieces. You can also submit it to other newspapers.

*Adapted from: APHA Health Reform Advocacy Toolkit, <https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/americanpublichealthassocadvocacytoolkit.pdf>; Let's Advocate for Clean Air! Toolkit, <https://cleanaircarolina.org/advocacy/>.*

## LOBBYING OP-ED EXAMPLE:

### **Keep SNAP to protect children living in poverty in Montana**

*All across Montana students headed back to school this month, some with regrets that summer is over. But for an estimated 43 percent of food insecure students who participate in the free or reduced-cost school meals program, returning to school can be a relief.*

*While our country and state enjoy relatively low unemployment rates, many families still struggle to make ends meet. This disparity is particularly evident in Yellowstone County where 41 percent of Billings Public School children (over 6,000 students) were enrolled in free or reduced price meals as of May 2018. Simultaneously, the local unemployment rate was just 2.8 percent. These students are eligible for free or low-cost meals because their hard-working family members are not earning enough to keep up with the cost of living.*

*Montana is one of the top states where people often need to work one, two, sometimes three different jobs to support their families, which means missing out on the crucial family time known to enhance child development and academic performance. A real living wage for one adult raising one child is \$24.59 an hour in Yellowstone County, but this type of income is incredibly hard to come by. Many of the primary job sectors in Billings and in Montana are low-paying, lack benefits, and lack a guaranteed number of work hours, despite being important work that we depend on every day. These are our cashiers, cooks, restaurant and hospitality workers, child care workers, health care aides, bank tellers, and personal care aids. With many jobs offering a wage close to the state minimum wage of just \$8.30 an hour, it's no wonder that parents struggle to afford housing, child care, food and other necessities.*

*Fortunately, families can depend on SNAP to help fill the gap. The true faces of SNAP in our state are Montanans doing their best but stymied by low wages that trap their families in poverty: the single mom who is working minimum wage at the local store with no paid sick days, the middle-age parents with a child who has severe developmental disabilities, the 55-year-old cashier who is laid off and has trouble finding a new job because stores only want to hire younger workers.*

*As long as incomes remain out of line with the cost of living, we will continue to need assistance programs, including SNAP. The number of working families seeking food assistance at Family Service in Billings has risen in the past year. Simultaneously, it has grown increasingly difficult for working families to access SNAP benefits because of the Office of Public Assistance closures and cuts across the state. To make matters worse, some members of Congress are calling for new restrictions, increasingly harsh time limits and added administrative burdens for SNAP participants. Such measures will not alleviate poverty in Montana — they will only worsen hunger and push families further into crisis.*

*Research shows poverty is the single greatest threat to children's well-being. If we want to do what is best for our people and our state, we should be strengthening programs like SNAP while we look for long-term solutions to address the gap between incomes and the cost of living. If Montanans could earn a real, living wage within the confines of a normal 40-hour work week, imagine how that could change the landscape of childhood poverty in this state.*

*We need our lawmakers to fight for a Farm Bill that recognizes the role that SNAP plays in providing stability for thousands of families across our state and here in Yellowstone County. We urge Sen. Steve Daines, Sen. Jon Tester, and Rep. Greg Gianforte to support a final bill that protects and strengthens this vital program.*

*[https://billingsgazette.com/opinion/columnists/quest-opinion-keep-snap-to-protect-children-living-in-poverty/article\\_9ce6aef1-2ede-57b7-9153-42b7536a6a8a.html](https://billingsgazette.com/opinion/columnists/quest-opinion-keep-snap-to-protect-children-living-in-poverty/article_9ce6aef1-2ede-57b7-9153-42b7536a6a8a.html)*

# LOBBYING: PROFILING LEGISLATORS

An effective lobbying message caters to each legislator. Building relationships with legislators involves knowing their background, policies they champion, and issues important to their district. Time with legislators is limited, so a profile shows you which aspects to emphasize, and which points to spend less time on.

## LEGISLATOR PROFILE FORM

**Name of Legislator:**

**Primary Cities/Counties in the District of Legislator:**

**Years Served In Current Position:**

**Position/Career Outside of Congress/Legislature:**

**Political Party:**

**Committee Assignments:**

**Spouse Career/Background:**

**Last Election Result:**

**Hometown:**

**Hometown/District Organization Affiliations (Church/Temple, Children Schools (if known), Organization/Club/Charities etc.):**

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**Contact Information:**

**Phone:**

**E-mail:**

**Recent Comments on Hunger Issues (include link to press clip/source):**

**If known, what are three of their top policy interests?**

**Notes:**

*Adapted from: Feeding America Network*