

ENGAGING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Spring 2018

General Tips:

- Arrive on time and be prepared. Try to arrive early to get through security and find the room.
- Remember that you might only get 15 minutes to meet. Get to your talking points quickly.
- Be prepared to meet with either your elected official or a staff member. Staff-level meetings can be very impactful, as staffers are experts working closely with elected officials to advise them on issues based on constituent input and persuasive information.
- Stay focused on issues related to hunger in the meeting – if the meeting goes off-topic (i.e. politics about Israel), thank them for sharing and redirect the conversation to your talking points.
- Although you might be tempted, try not to argue with your elected official or their staff about politics – there is no need to be adversarial in these meetings. Stay polite and on message.
- As a constituent, you have the right to request a meeting with your elected officials, educate them about issues you care about, and share your voice. Don't be intimidated – they work for you!

Before the Meeting:

- Practice what you want to discuss in advance. Stay on message, stick to your talking points, and be concise. Be specific about what you want and why, and when relevant refer to bills by name, number, and sponsors.
- Research your elected official's committee assignments, priority issues, voting record, and views on related issues.

During the Meeting:

- Start with a thank you to the legislator and/or staff, then briefly have each participant introduce themselves and their organization or community connections (no more than 30 seconds each!).
- Try to get specific answers: How will your elected official vote on this bill? What steps will they take to protect and strengthen SNAP? Legislators and staff may not want to make a commitment, so be persistent and ask the question in different ways to clearly request for what you want.
- Make sure at least one meeting participant shares a personal story or insight from the local community. This will help illustrate key points and why the issue is important to your community.
- Don't be afraid to acknowledge if you don't have an answer to a question. You are not meant to be an expert and this is an opportunity to follow up after the meeting.
- Before you leave, hand materials on the issue and about MAZON to your legislator and their staff.
- Don't forget to take a group picture with the Member and/or staff, and post on social media to highlight the meeting. Tag @MAZONusa and share the photo with MAZON.

After the Meeting:

- Convene a quick debrief with your group to compare impressions of what you heard in order to take accurate notes and plan effective follow-up actions. You can discuss what went well, what could have gone better, and what questions still need answers. Thank everyone for coming to help speak out on this important issue!
- Send a thank-you email to all individuals you met with and briefly re-state your "asks." It's a great opportunity to share follow-up information to answer any outstanding issues from the meeting.
- Make sure to be in touch with MAZON and fill out a meeting report-back form so MAZON staff can also follow up with the elected officials if needed.